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CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

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by

BILL KAY

PII Redacted

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This memoir is dedicated

To the members of my family

Murdered by the Nazis

And

To my daughter Rena and my three grandchildren:

Eric, Kevin and Elena –

The story of the relatives they never knew.

Thanks to my daughter, Rena, for encouraging me to write my memoir.

Special thanks to my wife, Rachel for her valuable help with the spelling.

And most of all, thanks to my friend, Clyde Doolittle

for the many hours he spent editing and typing.

EARLY MEMORIES

We lived in a small one-room house on Third-of-May Street on the outskirts of the small town of Pultusk in central Poland. A dirt road next to the house led to a farm behind the house. The farmer was our only immediate Polish neighbor. The apartment houses on either side of our house were occupied by Jewish families like ours.

The furniture in the house consisted of two beds at the very end of a long room, a rocker-crib for the baby at the foot of one of the beds, a simple table and chairs in the middle of the room, and a closet for my parents' better clothing.

At the entrance was a small wood-burning stove for cooking. In the fall, before it turned cold, father would replace the metal stove with a somewhat larger tile and brick stove, with a stove-pipe running along the room to heat the house during the winter months. In the spring, when the weather turned warmer, father would take apart the winter stove, and replace it with the smaller summer stove to make more room in the house for our large family; father, mother, three boys and three girls. In the middle of the room, a trap-door led to a cellar-like space under the house. The "cool room" was used to store perishable food during the warm summer months.

A kerosine lamp would be moved from place to place, wherever better lighting was needed. The water supply for the residents in the neighborhood was a faucet in the street, about a block away. The waste water and solid wastes were dumped in an open specified location in the immediate area. An outhouse, not too far from the house served both our neighbors and us. Firewood was purchased from the local fuel dealer. During the cold weather, hard coal or peat, in addition to firewood, would be used to heat the house. The older children would help with the various chores, such as bringing water, taking out waste, running to the small grocery store, bakery or milk products store, etc.

My oldest brother, Shalom, about 11 years old, and the second brother, Shymon, about 9 years old, attended public-universal school for Jewish children of the town.

I (Shlomo) seven years old, was the third, followed by Sister Sima, 5 years old, sister Lea, 3 years old, and the baby, Rachel, one year old, kept my mother busy with endless household chores. We all helped rock the cradle whenever the baby cried.

When my two older brothers returned from school, they would do their homework at the table, and I would watch them with admiration and envy.

I was also supposed to be in school, but one day I was caught in a sudden rainstorm on the way home from a friend's house. I started to run with my head down, looking at the sidewalk, when I collided with a man. I fell to the ground and burst out crying from the pain in my left arm. The man walked me home, and mother immediately took me to the doctor. It turned out to be a fractured collar bone. For about 6 weeks, I had to wear a small sack with a heavy rock in it, suspended from my shoulder like a lady's purse. The weight of the stone helped set the fractured bone. That kept me from starting school as scheduled, on September 1, 1936. I stayed out of the first grade completely.

Our house was on the borderline where the last town residents lived and where the small farms began.

During the summer, at dusk, I would watch the cows come home from the pasture. The young herdsman, with a stick in his hands, followed the herd and watched as, one-by-one, the cows peeled off the cobblestone road to the dirt roads leading to each farm. The farmer would be waiting with a bucket and a little stool, ready for the daily milking.

Sometimes mother would send me or my brother to a neighborhood farm to buy milk. When the lady would finish milking, she would pour the milk from the bucket through a cloth into a measuring cup, and then into our container. Minutes later we would be drinking fresh milk.

During the winter, brothers Shalom, Shymon and I would join neighborhood kids and play outside. We would create an icy slide in the street by running hard on the snow, then coming to a sudden and complete stop. The momentum would carry us farther and farther, and the slide would grow longer and longer. This would go on late into the evening.

We made our own skates by securing a piece of heavy-gauge wire to the bottom of a piece of wood and tying the improvised skates to the bottom of our shoes.

We built a sled from scrap lumber and would slide down the hill to the frozen river. We would repeat it for many hours, especially during moonlight nights. Some kids had commercial skates and sleds, but ours were just as much fun. Rubber balls were the only purchased toys in our family. Brother Shalom would start a game of soccer any time with any number of players, on any open space and with any ball we had.

It was a brief, but happy childhood experience.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

My father, Pesach Katz, met my mother Sara Riwka Goldstein, when he served in the Polish army, stationed in the area where mother lived. Father came from the town of Gorodenka, Ukraine, from a fairly well-to-do family. He graduated from the university with teacher's credentials, a rare achievement at that time. His academic credentials won him respect and special status in the community.

Mother came from a poor family in the town of Mlawa, Poland near the German border. Father's family did not approve of the marriage to a girl from a "lower social class." After the marriage, he broke off all contact with his family, and never got in touch with them again.

Father was of average height, trim and fit, with thinning black hair. He was even-tempered: I never saw him lose composure or raise his voice. He never talked about his parents, the rest of his family, or his home in general. The break in relations with his family was obviously a painful subject for him.

One of the few personal items father had was a bundle of papers from his days as a student at the university, which he treasured. I was impressed with several pages of drawings of the human body, the only thing I could understand. One page stands out in my mind: a drawing done in red and black ink. Red depicted the blood vessels in the body, and the other parts were done in black. The drawing was perfect; it looked like a printed page out of a medical book. Occasionally he would talk about his army experience. He had been assigned to a regimental headquarters in an administrative position. A wide leather belt was his only souvenir from the army.

He frequently talked about the value and importance of a good education. He talked about how some rich people lost all their possessions during World War I, and how they had difficulties coping with life. He would point out that one could lose riches, but never something that is more valuable than riches: an education. He would frequently be asked by people with limited education to write letters to the government for them. Community leaders asked him to run for the Jewish Community Leadership position, but he declined to get involved in politics. He was fluent in Polish, Russian, German and Yiddish languages.

Whenever we needed disciplining, he would threaten us with his army belt, but he seldom used it. Only once did he put me over his knee and use the belt on me.

My brother, Shymon and I, after a rain, would roll clay into cherry-sized balls, stick one of them on the end of a stick, and swing the stick to see who could throw the ball farther. One of these little clay balls hit a lady from the neighborhood farm. She started yelling at us. Father came out, apologized to the lady and promised her we would be punished for it. He told my brother and me to go into the house. He put us each in a corner, took out his army belt, and used it on both of us. I remember father using the army belt one other time. Brother Shymon bought himself a soccer ball without the knowledge of the parents. It was an expensive item for us. Apparently the money was intended for something other than a soccer ball.

One morning, brothers Shymon and Shalom were locked in a wrestling match. Shalom broke loose, lost his balance and fell against the stove. He hit the corner of the stove with his head, resulting in a cut. When Shymon saw the heavy bleeding, he ran out of the house and disappeared. Later in the day, mother returned home, but Shymon had not returned.

Father returned from work late in the evening, and Shymon still had not returned. Mother and father were very concerned about Shymon's all-day absence. Shymon felt responsible for Shalom's injury and he panicked. He was worried that he would be punished for it. Shalom's injury was not too serious, and my parents were relieved when Shymon finally returned later that evening. Shymon also was relieved; he realized that he was not to blame for the injury and was not punished.

We were not afraid of our father, but we had great respect for him.

Mother was about the same height as father, somewhat taller and slimmer than the average woman in the community. She was brunette, and lighter complexioned than father. She had a limited education, but she was articulate, intelligent, resourceful and very outspoken. She spoke Polish, German and Yiddish languages. I remember mother working from morning till night. She was either cooking, doing the wash, cleaning the house, taking care of the baby, etc.

She had no time for herself. She would never join us in pleasurable activities like going swimming in the river. Mother was the manager of the household, and she was the catalyst that made us a close and loving family. My parents were married in mother's home town of Mlawa.

After the birth of the first baby, brother Shalom, they settled in Pultusk, a small town close to mother's home town, but far away from father's home town of Gorodenka.

Father would leave for work early in the morning on a two kilometer walk, and he would return home late in the evening completely covered with flour. He managed one of the town's flour mills for the group of Jewish owners. Farmers brought grain for milling, and paid the bill with part of the flour. The farmers brought fresh produce or milk products to father as gifts. Life for us was pretty much the average in our community. We had enough to eat; clothing would be passed on from older children to younger children, until it fell apart. Rarely had a new item of clothing been bought, except for some special occasion, such as a holiday.

We later moved to an old one-room house about two blocks up the street. Here I became friends with a non-Jewish boy about my age. We spent many hours playing together in his family's orchard, back of our yard. Our house was adjacent to a cabinet maker's shop in a courtyard with several other houses. I would visit the shop and watch the owner and his helper make furniture. He would sometimes ask me to sweep the floor, which was always covered with wood shavings. As a reward, he would let me stir the pot of hot glue sitting on the stove.

One day a neighbor lady told us children to leave the house. Mother was going to have a baby. Father was away at work, and the neighbor arranged for the midwife to come to the house, the same as had happened with the six previous births. We played in the yard, and with some curiosity and some impatience, looked in the direction of the house. We peeked into the window through the sheer curtains, but could not see anything. A few hours later, we were told we could return to the house. The seventh and last child, brother Benjamin was born July 16, 1936. Little sister Rachel was moved out of the rocker-crib, which had been used for all the other babies, to make room for the new baby.

The owners of the mill were having problems with the government. Apparently, they hadn't been paying their taxes. Father was concerned about his job at the mill. Some time later, the government took over the mill and closed it. Father was out of a job; we did not have any savings, nor did we have any other source of income on which to live. He could not get a job in the public school system, because he had lost his teaching credentials in a fire some years ago. It required a lot of time and money to obtain new credentials. He took on tutoring jobs of children who needed assistance with their school homework. But the income was not dependable; some people would not always pay the money due him.

In early spring, father contracted to buy all of the fruit crop from an orchard in our neighborhood. He borrowed money to pay for the fruit in advance. As the fruit started to ripen, the entire family moved into a tent built out of straw in the middle of the orchard. As usual, mother did the housekeeping chores, and took care of the youngest children. The older children helped guard the orchard, and we picked the fruit as it ripened. The harvested fruit had been spread in large piles around the tent, where it would be safe from thieves. Some of the ripened fruit had been sold to walk-in customers, and to officers of the local 13th Army Regiment. The remainder of the summer fruit was to be sold in the outdoor farmer's market, and the winter variety was to be stored in a cool cellar, to be gradually sold as it ripened during the winter months. The proceeds from the sale of the fruit would have been enough to pay off the loan and provide us with a decent income through the winter months, until father found another job.

On a Friday evening, mother lit the traditional Sabbath candles, and placed them on a board on the straw-covered ground in the tent. One of the candles flipped over and set the tent on fire. The fire spread quickly, engulfing the entire straw tent. Suddenly, mother yelled: "The baby is asleep in the tent!" Father ran into the tent, coming out with baby Benjamin in his arms; then he collapsed. Baby Benjamin was unharmed, and father came out with some singed hair and fainted. The entire tent burned down, and the heat from the flames baked the surrounding piles of fruit on the ground, ruining most of it. Father's investment would obviously not be profitable any longer.

The family tried to earn money in various ways. A candy-maker gave us large metal trays full of freshly-made candy. Our job was to wrap each candy in a colored cellophane-type wrapper.

Another family job was to make various-sized shopping bags. The bags were used by grocery stores for staples such as flour, cereal, sugar, salt, etc. All staples were sold in bulk, by the kilogram. The bag-maker gave us large sheets of butcher-type paper, patterns and paste. We cut the paper into various shapes, using the patterns and glued them to form bags. It was a lot of fum for us kids, but we earned little money.

Father would leave at the same time each morning in search of work, and return at the end of the day disappointed. Then, one day, he came home with good news. The Organization for Rehabilitation and Training (ORT) was planning to open a school in Pultusk, and offered him the position of principal. He happily accepted the job, and immediately got involved in organizing and equipping the school. It had opened to teach skills to young people in the Jewish community, and to prepare them for jobs in the local shops.

We moved again, this time to a very small apartment on the third floor of a three-story building in a complex of apartment houses in the center of town on Pjotra Skarga Street. It was much closer for father to walk to his job at the ORT school. The school consisted of two large rooms filled with manual sewing machines and manual knitting machines. At each machine sat a young woman practicing her craft. Father was enthusiastic about his work; he was involved in the education of young people, the work for which he was trained.

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

The entire street-level of our building was occupied by small businesses. There was a small milk-products store with everything inside white and spotless. The owner's daughter always dressed in a white coat when serving customers from behind the glass-case counter.

There was a bakery, with it's fresh-baked bread smell filling the air every morning.

There was a tiny grocery store, which I visited almost every day. The owner, Meyer was the only person from Pultusk, whom I encountered in Germany after the War - more about this later.

There was a bicycle rental and repair shop. I spent many hours watching the mechanics work on bicycles, and thought someday I would become a bicycle mechanic. Once I managed to save 20 grosh (the price of a loaf of bread) and rented a bicycle for half an hour. I attempted to learn to ride a bike with the help of my brother Shymon, but the walk to the town square, and back to the shop used up most of the time. I realized it would require many hours to learn to ride a bike.

Another day, while I was standing with several young men in front of Meyer's grocery store, a gypsy-woman tried to sell her fortune-telling service to the men. None of the men showed any interest, but the gypsy was very persistent. Finally, one of the men whispered to her: "Go tell the fortune to Meyer, his brother is in the civil war in Spain." With this bit of information the gypsy quickly succeeded in selling her services to Meyer, the grocer. The men had a good laugh, and I learned about the art of fortune-telling.

One warm summer evening, I was with mother in the street, when we met a lady neighbor of ours. They talked for a long time. I became impatient, and wanted to go home. She promised to go home soon, but the conversation went on and on. To my surprise, the town clock struck one, and all the lights in town went out. I didn't know the town's electric power plant operated only until one o'clock in the morning. Even those who had electricity in their homes needed a kerosine lamp for lighting. The next day, I bragged to my friends that I had stayed up till one o'clock, until the electricity went out.

THE DAYS PRECEDING THE WAR

During the summer of 1937, on my way home from cheder (religious school), I sneaked a ride on the back of a horse-drawn wagon. The driver was known to be mean; and he did not allow kids to ride on his wagon. Sometimes he would use his whip to keep the kids away. The wagon moved pretty fast as it approached our house. I tried to get off quickly, but as I slid down the side of the wagon, I fell to the ground, and the wheel ran over my arm. I wound up with a cast, and a metal brace on my arm for about a month. That kept me from starting school for the second year in a row. Therefore, I did not attend second grade either.

During the summer of 1938, father thought I should start school in the third grade, as appropriate for kids my age. Since I did not attend first or second grades, father decided to tutor me for the required entry examination, in order to skip two grades. He arranged with the school authorities for the exam. Because father had very little time, my tutoring consisted of only two sessions. My additional, informal education came from watching my two older brothers do their homework. The entry exam consisted of oral and written arithmetic problems, and a written test in the Polish language. The exam was very difficult for me, and I felt I did not pass. However, a few days later, the school notified us that I was accepted into the third grade. My only prior exposure to formal education was about six months of religious school, in Hebrew. I started attending third grade September 1, 1938.

It was a very awkward start for me. The first week in school, after the teacher made her presentation to the class, she called on a girl to come to the front of the class. She asked the girl a question on the subject. The girl gave a satisfactory answer and the teacher dismissed her. The girl curtsied and returned to her seat. I was the second student called in front of the class. The teacher asked me a question and I gave a satisfactory answer. When she dismissed me I curtsied and the whole class burst out in laughter. I realized the curtsy was the cause of the laughter, but didn't understand why. When the next boy was called in front of the class, he bowed before he returned to his seat. I then realized that boys bow and girls curtsy. It was a very humiliating experience for me.

All the kids in third grade seemed sophisticated. They knew how to behave properly in a school environment; and most importantly, they knew how to study. Everything was new to me: I had problems with homework. It was a very frustrating period. The second half of the school year became easier. I actually started to enjoy it. I finished third grade with above-average grades and was looking forward to the start of fourth grade the following September.

The school I attended was for the children of the town's Jewish community. Most of the teachers were Jewish, and Polish was the only language used. The other public school included mandatory classes in Catholicism and Catholic prayer. Therefore, The Jewish community had a separate system for its children.

Like all Jews in Poland, we were religious, conservative by current American standards, but reformed by contemporary standards in our community. Father was clean-shaven, and indistinguishable in dress and appearance from the general Polish population. He prayed every morning before going to work. My two older brothers and I went to Sabbath and Holiday services with father. My older brother Shalom became Bar Mitzva, like all Jewish boys at age thirteen. We observed strict kosher dietary laws. We spoke Yiddish in the house. Our close friends and most of our neighbors were Jewish. The Jewish community constituted a separate society with a separate language, and it's own distinct culture and religion different from the Polish, Catholic population.

The Sabbath was truly a day of rest, and a joyous family day. Father was home, and we always had a good traditional Friday evening meal after we came home from the synagogue. Saturday noon, after the morning services, the meal always included delicious traditional cholent (cooked in an oven overnight). In the afternoon, we frequently spent time with father in some pleasant activity, or we would visit friends. During the summer, we would go swimming in the nearby river Narew. Or we would go for long walks together.

One Saturday afternoon, we walked several miles to where, the day before, a plane had landed on a grassy field. It was a great event for the town, and a very exciting experience for me. It was the first time I had seen a plane on the ground so close. It was much smaller than I imagined it would be.

Josef Pilsudski, the dictator of Poland, died in 1935. The documentary film of the state funeral was shown in the local theater, free to the public.

It was the first time I had seen any movie. The experience was so fascinating, my brother Shymon and I saw the movie three times. On my way home from the theater, a Polish boy taunted me: "Jew, your grandpa died!" I experienced the same taunt the following day. It really puzzled me. Instead of being sad at the death of the leader of the country, the boy seemed to be pleased. And what did the Jews have to do with it?

When I told it to my father, he explained that Pilsudski had been good to the Jews and discouraged anti-Semitism.

When I was about seven years old, mother sent me to the store to buy milk. As I was walking with the empty glass jar in my hands, an older Polish boy taunted "Jew" at me, and followed closely behind me. I speeded up to get away from him, but he continued to follow and threaten me. I started to run, tripped and fell. The jar shattered and caused a deep cut in my right hand. I turned for home, crying and leaving a trail of blood behind me. When mother saw me, she grabbed a sheer curtain, pulled it down and tied it tightly around my forearm to stop the bleeding; then took me immediately to a doctor. He sewed up a severed tendon and the wound. The thumb on my right hand does not bend as a result of that incident.

Our relationship with the Polish neighbors was usually civil but distant. Close relationships were rare. The Polish population, in general, was openly and strongly anti-Semitic. In 1938 and 1939, signs: "Do not buy from Jews" had been painted on buildings throughout town. Anti-Semitic activities had become more open; and they appeared to have been well organized.

A VISIT TO GRANDMOTHER

In the summer of 1939, mother went on a trip to visit her mother in the town of Mlawa. I was drawn by the adventure of travel, wanted to see other places and to meet relatives for the first time. After a few days of mother's absence, I asked father if I could join mother and meet my grandmother. When father came home the next evening, he said he had made arrangements for me to make the trip. I was ecstatic! A driver was taking a load of vinegar in his horse-drawn wagon to Mlawa the next day, and he would take me along.

The following day late in the afternoon, father took me to a small storage shed full of bottled vinegar. A man was loading a covered wagon in which he neatly placed the bottles on a layer of straw. The man told me to climb into the wagon and help load the vinegar. I continued to place the bottles in the established pattern, until the entire surface was covered with bottles. A new layer of straw was spread over the bottles, and another layer of bottles was placed on top. This careful loading continued until the entire shipment was loaded. The last layer of straw was spread to cover the bottles.

Some space was still left between the last layer of straw and the canvas that covered the wagon. The driver told me I could sleep on top of the cargo, as we would be traveling at night. I asked him to wake me when we got to the railroad so that I could see a train; I had only seen pictures of them. The driver sat in the front of the wagon all night to mind the horse. When I awoke, it was already broad daylight.

I asked the driver: "How much longer to the railroad?" He replied: "We already passed it."

It was a great disappointment, but I joined the driver in the front of the wagon, and we continued the journey without stopping.

I was intensely observing everything around us. We entered the town of Mlawa. The town looked different than our town of Pultusk. The architecture was more ornate, the houses had more character, and the town seemed more prosperous than our town. The experience was very exciting to me. The driver dropped me off at my destination.

Mother was very surprised to see me, but welcomed me with joy and motherly affection. We went to see my grandmother. My visit was a complete surprise, but she was excited and thrilled to see me. She took me to the open market, and we went to the various stalls to show off her grandson to all her friends. She insisted that I have some soda water with whatever fruit juice flavor I desired. Grandmother then took out her coins she had wrapped in a handkerchief, found three grosh (a few pennies) and paid for the drink. I realized that she was very poor, and that spending the three grosh was a generous gesture. She was very happy and very proud her grandson had come to visit her. And I was happy to have met one of my grandparents.

Later in the day, the driver with his wagon arrived. Mother and I climbed onto the wagon and sat on an improvised bench behind him. We started the journey back home to Pultusk in the middle of the day. We encountered military trucks with soldiers, loaded with barbed wire reels, moving in the opposite direction.

I asked: "Where are they going, and why do all the trucks carry barbed wire?"

Mother answered: "They are going to the German border; there is talk of war."

When we arrived home in Pultusk, life seemed normal, except the usual preparation in August for school opening in September was not taking place this time.

One day, there was unusual excitement about a speech Hitler was going to make that evening. A crowd, including many children, my parents, and me, assembled in the street in front of our building to listen to Hitler's speech. A neighbor who was fortunate enough to have electricity in his apartment placed his radio in the open window so those people who did not have one could listen to the very important speech. People expected to hear the decision whether or nor there would be war. There was complete silence as Hitler started to speak. The static on the radio made it hard to understand exactly what he was saying. It seemed like the speech went on and on; at times he spoke very loudly and seemed to get excited. Men were heatedly discussing the political

situation between Poland and Germany. The speech ended, and there was no clear answer whether there would be war.

I had been looking forward to starting fourth grade September 1st; but everybody was now concerned with the threat of war!

THE START OF THE WAR

On September 1, 1939, The Germans invaded Poland. My parents were discussing leaving Pultusk before the Germans came. The decision was a difficult one because of the very young children in our family, and the journey would have to be undertaken on foot. All public institutions ceased to function, including public transportation. There was total panic, especially in the Jewish community. The treatment of Jews by Germans was well-known. The Jews had been expelled from the neighboring provinces of Germany the year before. They were driven across the border, and not allowed to take any of their belongings. These Jewish refugees spread throughout Poland, including our town of Pultusk, and told of brutal treatment by the Germans.

There was no official information about the military situation, but the rumor was that the German army was advancing at a fast pace. Formations of German planes flew overhead in the direction of Warsaw. The sound of machine gun fire was heard; someone said it came from the church steeple, and was directed at the German planes. The gunfire was completely ineffective. That evening we heard a shot, and the sky lit up outside our window. Apparently, it was a flare. As it slowly floated down to the ground, darkness returned. We anticipated that something terrible would happen. The night remained quiet.

The next day word spread that a public meeting would be held in the town square. At the meeting, they told the public what safety precautions should be taken. One of the precautions was to paste strips of paper across window panes to keep them from shattering in the event of bombs exploding in the area. The meeting intensified the concern about possible battles in our town.

On the outskirts of town, the Polish military were deliberately burning houses on the side of the street we used to live on, to prepare the area for a defensive position against the German advance. People were saying it didn't make any sense, that it was probably sabotage. People lined the street and watched the Polish army retreating from Pultusk in the direction of Warsaw. The continuous procession lasted all day and into the night. It included horse-drawn artillery pieces, soldiers on foot, columns of cavalrymen holding spears with little white flags on top. They were abandoning the helpless population without putting up any resistance.

Father decided we would take whatever we could carry and start walking toward Warsaw early the next morning. The reasoning was that Warsaw would be defended and saved from the Germans. He thought it would be the safest place for us to be. The plans on what to take kept changing; many things were needed. The youngest of the seven children was three years old, and the second youngest was five years old. Both would have to be carried. The children were told to go to bed earlier than our usual bedtime to be rested for the next day's journey. We were awakened early in the morning. Each one of the older children got something to carry. Starting down the stairs from our third-floor apartment, it immediately became apparent we carried too much. It was especially heavy for father; he carried a big bundle on his back, and little sister Rachel in his arms. As we reached the street, we encountered other people setting out on the same journey. We left Pultusk on the road leading to Warsaw. Our immediate destination was the neighboring town of Wyszkow. The road was filled with columns of military units moving in the same direction. The middle of the road was strictly for the military. The civilian population used the shoulders.

Traffic was very heavy, all going one way. The loads we carried got too heavy, and we finally abandoned some of our belongings on the road, in order to continue walking and reach our destination before nightfall. The military units moved at a faster pace and finally passed us. The civilian population spread to the entire width of the road, slowly moving toward Wyszkow. It was late in the day, and everybody was exhausted. In the distance, the outskirts of the town came into view. Columns of smoke were rising from various areas in the town. We now heard a continuous exchange of artillery fire over our heads, apparently directed at the town, our destination for a night's rest. We continued our course, entering the outskirts of the town. Downed electric power lines in the middle of the road were sparking. Someone warned us not to touch or step on the dangerous wires. It was dusk when we entered the center of the town, looking for a place to spend the night. We spotted some activity in a two story building on a narrow street. It turned out to be a small synagogue, a good place to rest for the night. The people inside were refugees like us. We entered the building, and my parents found a clear place on the floor for the family to bed down for the night. The children lay down, and I immediately fell asleep and slept all night in spite of the continuous artillery duel. When I awoke in the morning, father was out checking the area to look for a safe way to continue our journey. He had returned with the news that the bridge across the river Bug was destroyed.

The Polish army blew it up to slow the advance of the Germans. It also cut our escape route. We could not continue our journey, and we were trapped in Wyszkow. The immediate concern became the daily needs of food and water while awaiting the arrival of the dreaded Germans. The people in the synagogue became like one family. The men went out in search of food. They found an abandoned bakery with some flour, and baked enough bread to last for several days for everybody in the group.

Mother and I went outside to look over the immediate neighborhood. Near the synagogue was an abandoned wagon without the horse, and with a wounded soldier sitting in it. His head was completely bandaged, and only his mouth and nose were exposed. Mother asked the soldier if he wanted anything. There was no answer. Mother brought some water and tried to feed it to him with a spoon, but he barely managed to take tiny sips. The Polish military had left, abandoning the seriously wounded soldier. There was no local authority or any functioning organization left. The town of Wyszkow was abandoned. We encountered no local residents in the area. All the people around us were refugees like ourselves. The artillery fire intensified and sounded much closer, turning into an endless duel. Smoke was rising to the sky from various areas of the town, and flames were visible only a short distance away.

As darkness fell, father seemed more concerned about our safety. He was in and out of the building checking the situation. He told the children to go to sleep. At dawn, father woke us suddenly. He was very agitated. the roof of our building was on fire, and we had to get out quickly. The family left the building together, leaving most of the personal belongings behind. We went down the street, away from the burning building, and walked past the wounded soldier in the wagon, who was still sitting in the same position. We turned the corner and suddenly faced a German soldier with a pistol pointed at us.

Mother said, "Good morning," He replied, "Good morning." He motioned with his pistol for us to walk ahead of him. A shot was heard.

Mother whispered, "They probably shot the wounded soldier."

He led us to another street, where we saw a group of people assembled and guarded by German soldiers. We had been delivered to an assembly point. Other groups led by armed German soldiers joined the gathering all morning.

The assembly grew larger; it seemed like the entire population from the town was being rounded up and assembled here. Reality hit us. Poland was no longer independent! The Germans were now masters of the country.

People were silent and apprehensive, wondering what they would do with us. The number of German soldiers increased. Some appeared to be officers. They stood some distance away, talking among themselves, probably deciding our fate. At dusk, additional soldiers appeared. Suddenly they were yelling orders for us to move. A column quickly formed in the middle of the road. We started moving. Men, women and children, young and old, were streaming from other streets. They merged with the main column, driven by battle-dressed German soldiers. Some of them were on horses with whips in their hands, yelling "schneller" (faster), driving us like a herd of cattle. It was now completely dark, the dust was thick, from hundreds of shuffling feet, and from the horses galloping on either side of the people. It was difficult for some of the older people to keep up. Moans and cries were heard. A man was pleading that he could not go on; a shot rang out. The voice was silenced. Mother with the baby in her arms, was weeping. Father was carrying five year-old Rachel. We were holding hands, desperately trying to stay together.

In one area, the road was lined with soldiers, some with flashlights in their hands, taunting, yelling insults and laughing; they were in a festive mood. It seemed we were driven for several hours. They ordered us to halt near a farm. There the people were herded into a yard. From the twinkling of several small lights, it was apparent this was a large farm with several buildings. We could see a house, a large barn, and several smaller buildings in the dim lights. We were wondering what would happen next.

Soon a German made an announcement for all men to report to one of the smaller buildings, somewhat removed from the yard area. The women and children, a much larger group, were ordered to go to the large barn for the night. My parents were trying to decide whether my oldest brother Shalom, who was 14 should go with father, or whether he should stay with mother and the rest of the children. The consideration was: Would he be better off as a man or a child. It was decided Shalom would stay with us. Father left us with the hope the separation was for the night only. We all assumed the men were separated for the night, and expected to see father in the morning.

It was a very confusing night in this barn, packed with women and children, wondering what would happen tomorrow. It was the very first time father was away from the family, even for one night. It was a restless night, even for the children. We slept huddled together, sitting on the dirt floor, as there was no room to lie down. Dawn finally came, and we could now see the isolated farm with its scattered buildings. All the interest was focused on the distant building, where the men reported the night before. There was no sign of any activity in that building. There was no sign of the men anywhere on the farm. The wives tried to question the Germans to find out where the men were. The vague answer was we would be reunited soon. Later that morning, the Germans ordered everybody from the farm back on the road to resume the march, this time without the men, and in broad daylight. Now the column of women and children was guarded by only a few soldiers. We marched until we reached a small farm, where we assembled in the yard and waited. The women persisted in questioning the Germans regarding the whereabouts of the men. The women no longer believed them.

A small group of us were standing in the middle of the yard, when a young German came over and tried to make friendly conversation.

He asked a young girl, "What is your name?" The girl answered, "Gitla."

The soldier laughed, and asked, "What did you say, Hitler?"

She repeated, "Gitla."

It was the first non-hostile contact made with a German soldier.

Later in the day, a squealing pig was being pursued by a German with a pistol in his hand. The pig was running around in circles; the German was yelling in frustration. The pig stopped, and tried to change direction; the German fired, and the pig fell. The German roared with laughter.

More armed German soldiers arrived. They assembled some distance away, and seemed to be discussing something. The tension returned.

People were intently watching every move the newly arrived Germans made, looking for clues that would reveal what was being planned for us. The soldiers broke up their meeting. Soon the order was given for everybody to go to the empty building.

People started filing into the building. We followed, and soon the room was full. The building was one large square room with two small windows and one door. The Germans ordered others into the already filled building. Mother made sure we all stayed together with her. We were located in the middle of the room, standing packed like sardines. The windows and door were closed; it was stuffy with little air. The rumor spread that they were going to set the building on fire, with us in it. Mother told us to repeat with her a prayer, in Hebrew, for the dying. She unbuttoned and loosened the clothing on all the children, so death would come faster. People were fainting. Babies were held high to keep them from being crushed by pressure from all the bodies. Mother was concerned that father would never know what happened to us.

Suddenly, the door opened, and the Germans told everybody to come out of the building. This turn of events was like a miracle. They ordered us out onto the road, marched us a short distance, and told us to get off the road down to one side. We were gathered on a slope between the roadbed and the field below. There were no buildings in sight; it was a secluded spot. Armed German soldiers were at the bottom of the slope, on the field guarding us.

Additional soldiers arrived walking their bicycles with machine guns mounted on them. They were equally spaced, so that they covered the entire area occupied by the people. The machine guns were aimed at us. Our immediate conclusion was they had decided to shoot us, instead of burning us alive. In a way, we were relieved; it was a better way to die. Our eyes were fixed on the Germans; they seemed to be waiting for something. Soon two officers appeared. They were met by two soldiers, who were probably in charge of our custody. They huddled in conversation. We could not hear what they were saying, but we were certain they were discussing our fate. We were convinced that the decision to kill us was made, and that the only question when and where it would happen.

THE RETURN TO PULTUSK

The Germans broke up their huddle and dispersed. One of the soldiers walked toward us, stopping at the bottom of the slope, and motioning for us to get closer to him. He yelled out that he had important instructions. He said we were free! He told us to take the road, and walk in the direction of Pultusk. He strongly emphasized that no one should leave the road; and everybody, regardless of where they came from, must go all the way to Pultusk. Mother asked about the men. He said the men would be waiting for us in Pultusk. We were elated! This was exactly what we were hoping for - returning to our home town, and being reunited with father!

We started out walking with some skepticism about our freedom. We thought it might be some kind of trick. Nobody interfered with our leaving, so we became more confident that we were actually free to go home. We joined the civilian traffic, mostly on foot, some by horse and buggy, and all moving in the direction of Pultusk.

At the time, the surroundings seemed peaceful. The only reminders of war were occasional formations of planes flying overhead in the direction of Warsaw, probably to bomb the city. We were nearing the woods on the outskirts of Pultusk. The woods, about 300 meters to the left of us, were full of military vehicles and German soldiers. We moved to the right side of the road, to put more distance between us and the Germans, hoping they would not stop us. We walked in silence. Faint German voices reached us, and the tension returned. We were approaching the river Narew which borders Pultusk, and the surroundings became familiar. The excitement grew; we were practically home! When we reached the river, we found the bridge had been destroyed, but a temporary pontoon bridge was right next to the collapsed bridge. German soldiers were directing a continuous stream of people across the pontoon bridge into Pultusk.

We crossed the bridge, and were finally in our home town. We were walking toward the center of town, where our home was. We were filled with anticipation and excitement; we would be home in about ten minutes! Physically, the area looked the same; no damage was visible. There were soldiers everywhere. The usually vibrant streets had changed drastically. The shops were closed; fewer people were in the streets, and the atmosphere was subdued. We reached Pjotra Skarga Street where we lived, and things looked the same. We entered the

courtyard, then the doorway of our building. We started to climb the stairs leading to our third-floor apartment, anxious and full of hope that father would be there waiting for us. We opened the door and entered the apartment, but there was no sign of father. The place looked exactly as we had left it. Our disappointment was indescribable! Without father, it didn't feel like home. The Germans had told us father would be in Pultusk when we returned. They had lied to us all along. Mother's immediate task was to find out where father was, and when he would return to us. She went to the military headquarters in Pultusk to discover the fate of the men who had been separated from their families two days before in Wyszkow. The Germans told mother the men would return soon. Others heard some people had been taken to work on some projects, and we believed they would return once the projects were finished.

Every day, mother would make the trip to the German headquarters to inquire about father, and would return with the same answer. She was skeptical about any of their promises. The Germans gave her the same old promise. One day, mother created a scene, and demanded a truthful answer. They threw her out of the office. People who witnessed the incident warned mother it was very dangerous to talk back to the Germans, so she never went back there again.

One day, mother recognized a man with a severe limp; he had been among the men taken away at Wyszkow. She came home excited, and she felt a tiny ray of hope. He told mother the men had been escorted by German soldiers on a country road. He could not keep up with them, so they allowed him to become separated. He did not know what happened to the others. The man with the limp was one of the few non-Jews in the group. It may have been a factor in his survival. The rumor was that all the men taken away from their families had been shot in a field somewhere between Wyszkow and Pultusk. Father was only 39 years old.

Mother was suddenly the sole provider for a family of seven children. She was concerned as to how we would live. We had food to last only a few days, and no savings. Some basic staple foods could still be bought from the farmers, or on the black market. Now, mother was looking for a way to earn some money to pay for the food needed to feed the family.

The military movements through the town continued; soldiers on foot, soldiers on horses, soldiers with horse-drawn artillery, soldiers on bicycles, etc. Mother bought a large basket of apples, divided them into paper bags, went out to the passing military columns in the street, and quickly sold all the

apples. Next day, she bought a larger quantity of apples, and sold them also. The third day, I went along with mother and helped carry bags of apples. Mother followed the moving convoy; the soldiers would grab a bag and pay her with Polish money. One soldier on a horse grabbed a bag of apples, and refused to pay for it. Mother ran after him and demanded payment, but he ignored her. This happened occasionally, but she accepted it as part of doing business with them. Mother managed to earn enough money to take care of our immediate needs. We were settling into a life without father.

One day, a neighbor told us the stores in the town square, which had been closed because the owners were absent, had been forced open; and the people were helping themselves to the merchandise. Mother, brother Shymon and I went to the square. The stores were crowded with people, but there was little merchandise left. In one of the stores, we found large sacks of grain cereals. We took two sacks of the cereal (an ideal, non-perishable staple for the next few months). Mother was trying very hard to provide us with food for the winter. She sent me to a place on the outskirts of town to pick wild fruit. This fruit would be stored in the attic, and would gradually ripen during the winter months. I picked as much as I could carry, and returned home.

The next day, I went to pick some more, but a German soldier stopped me, and ordered me to follow him into the yard of the high school, where he put me to work. The military had taken over the school, and were picking people off the street to clean the yard. After I had been working for several hours, one of the soldiers, who was older than the others, gave me half a loaf of warm black bread, and told me I was free to leave. Another soldier, younger and probably of higher rank, rushed over to me, took the bread away, and yelled, "'raus" (out). I noticed the writing on the belt buckle of the soldier read "Gott mit uns" (God is with us). I was puzzled, and wondered if people who behaved as they did, really believed in God, or that He would ever be on their side. I was ecstatic when the Germans let me go. Other people had been taken off the streets, and had disappeared. I returned home late and empty handed, but mother was overjoyed to see me.

Most daily needs became scarce; one of these was tobacco. Smokers reused the tobacco from discarded cigarette butts. Cigarette shells and papers were still available. I went out into the street to collect cigarette butts discarded by German soldiers.

Youngsters would salvage the remaining tobacco, use it to stuff cigarette shells, and sell them to desperate smokers. Three soldiers were standing in the street, casually talking. One of them threw away what seemed to be half a cigarette. As I bent down to pick it up, one of the soldiers kicked me with his boot and roared with laughter. That was my first experience with the Nazi occupation of Pultusk.

Rumors were that people disappeared, and were shot for no reason at all. There was great anxiety about the future under German occupation. There was talk the war was over, except for isolated fighting. There was no official news at all. We lived from day to day, without any plans. Chances that father would ever return were diminishing, but we still hoped for a miracle.

THE EXPULSION

In the morning, September 26, 1939, brother Shalom looked out the window and exclaimed, "Mother, look at all those people in the street!"

Entire families: men, women and children, some carrying bundles filled the street. It was obvious they had left their homes in a hurry.

Mother exclaimed, "Children, quick, grab some warm clothing, and get ready to leave the house!" She started to collect things from the dresser for the baby. The door opened, and a tall German burst into the room, and in a loud voice ordered us, "'raus." Mother begged for a few minutes to collect some essential things for the youngest children.

The German repeated in aloud and stern voice, and motioned with his stick, "'raus."

As we walked down the stairs, the soldier closely behind, ordered us, "schneller" (faster).

We did not encounter anybody on the way down, or in the courtyard. We lived on the upper floor; it seemed we were the last to leave the building. The gentile couple who lived next door to us were not disturbed. It seemed the Germans knew exactly where the Jews lived. Collaborators among the local residents probably helped them. We were escorted out into the street to join the assembled crowd. We recognized some people from the neighborhood; they were all Jewish. Nobody expected this! Everybody was stunned and confused. It had happened so fast and so suddenly.

Our situation was especially difficult. A mother with seven young children, ages 3 to 14, without a father. We searched the crowd for friends to stay close to. More people were coming from every direction. The crowd was growing ever larger. It looked as if all the Jews were being rounded up and driven from Pultusk. The rumor was that German residents from surrounding areas were waiting to move into the homes of the evicted Jews. We were surrounded by armed soldiers. The order was given to move, and we followed the people in front of us. We were driven in the direction of the river Narew. The park near the bridge came into view. The column of people was moving through the gate into

the park. A large crowd was already assembled inside the park next to a small building. Non-Jewish residents gathered on the hill overlooking the park to observe the spectacle. We saw close friends from another part of the town. Their oldest son carried a neighbor's daughter, a polio victim, on his back. Concern and speculation heightened. What was going to happen next? People were being funneled into a small building. Our turn came, and we entered the building. The room was lined with soldiers along the walls. They ordered the people to turn in all their valuables: jewelry, watches and money. At the soldiers' feet were buckets filled with coins and other valuables. After the valuables were turned in, soldiers searched the people, especially the men, for hidden valuables. I heard scuffles and beatings, but did not dare look up. Mother turned over money, hesitated and took off her wedding band, and gave it to one of the soldiers. She wiped away her tears, and we exited the building.

Other armed soldiers drove us out of the park toward the bridge. as we trudged on, we noticed a lot of commotion on the bridge. As we approached the bridge, mother urged us to stay close to her, and not to look at the soldiers. All along the bridge, the soldiers taunted us, laughed at us, and some of them were beating people with sticks. Mother seemed amazingly calm. We crossed the bridge without a physical beating; others were less fortunate.

According to the Encyclopedia Judaica: The Jewish presence in Pultusk dates back to the year 1486. In 1931, the community counted 8,300 Jewish residents, and the number was probably higher in 1939. In a single day, September 1939, the 453 year-old Jewish community consisting of about 9,000 men, women and children was brought to an abrupt and violent end.

THE JOURNEY TO RUSSIA

Once again, we followed people on the road leading away from our native town of Pultusk. Only this time, we were without father. We were facing an uncertain future.

After walking some distance, people told us where we could get something to eat. A nearby Jewish farmer gave us bread and some whey. It was our first food that day.

We didn't know a Jewish farmer lived in the area. Jews in Poland were not allowed to own land; but in rare cases, Jews were given governmental dispensation to buy land. This Jewish farmer was safe from the Germans for the time being because he lived outside Pultusk.

We walked on the road with other refugees for many long hours. It was getting late in the day, and mother thought about where to stay the night. We turned off the main road to a small village. Mother asked two peasants for a place to sleep. Both said no; but the third one allowed us to stay at his house. A few other Jews were already there. The floor was covered with straw on which we could sleep. On the stove was a big pot with potatoes. The hostess mashed the boiled potatoes, prepared some gravy, and offered it to all the strangers in her house. Mother served us kids a plate of mashed potatoes covered with gravy. Brother Shalom noticed tiny specks of ham in the gravy, and he hesitated, because he knew it was against dietary laws to eat pork. Mother assured us it was all right to eat it, but she herself did not take the gravy.

We were exhausted, and slept soundly that night. In the morning, we resumed our journey, walking on country roads. Many others like ourselves were on the road, all going east. Mother would beg for food in the villages, and we would stop for the night in the home of some sympathetic peasant.

Once mother saw the name "Katze" (our name was Katz) on a farmer's gate, so she went in to ask for some bread. Because of the similar name, we thought it might have been a Jewish farmer. As soon as mother stepped into the house, the lady yelled at her: "Get out. Hitler is doing the right thing to the Jews!" Mother came out very agitated and yelled: "You and your Hitler can go to hell!"

It happened to have been a Polish-German farmer. Fortunately, the farmer could not inform on mother, because there were no soldiers in the area. German soldiers would shoot people on the slightest provocation, and sometimes they would shoot for no reason at all.

As we walked at a fairly slow pace, peasants with their horses and wagons would pass us every once in a while. I decided to have some fun and sneak rides in the back of passing wagons. I would stay on the wagon as long as my family was in sight, then jump off and wait for them. One wagon I rode approached a junction. Straight ahead was the village, but the wagon turned right. My family was now out of sight, but I remained on the wagon. I decided to get off and wait for my family to catch up. Then I became concerned when there was no sign of them. I walked back and forth several times, asking people whether they had seen my family; but they had not. It was getting dark, and I began to panic. The situation seemed desperate. Would I ever see my family again?! it was already dark when I went into the village, asking people if they had seen a woman with six children. A lady heard me, and told me about a house in the village that was open to refugees. She suggested I stay there overnight, and resume search for my family in the morning. The nice lady took me to the house she had mentioned. It was filled with refugees. Suddenly I saw mother rushing toward me, crying. She embraced me and held me tightly. She asked many questions, but did not expect or wait for answers; that was without question, the most joyous moment of my life. I was reunited with my family!

Whenever we reached a town with a Jewish community, we would spend the night in the synagogue. The few remaining local Jews in the community helped with food. The distance to the Russian border was still considerable. The October weather was getting chilly, and we wanted to reach the border as quickly as possible. Mother was looking for transportation going east.

We went to the town railroad station where a freight train was parked. It was impossible to get information on the movement of trains; however, a man thought the train was going east. People started to board the train, and we followed them. We were not certain of the destination, but we were hoping it would go in the right direction. We heard a bang, and we all fell in one direction. The locomotive had attached itself. The train jerked forward and we fell in the opposite direction as it started to move. I had always wanted to see a train, and now I was riding one. It was not so exciting

nor as adventurous as I had imagined it would be, under these circumstances. The train was actually heading east in the direction we wanted to go.

We got off at the first stop, a small town. Our immediate concern was a place to stay for the night. We located the town synagogue. The doors were open, but no one was inside. it seemed many Jews from the town had fled across the border to escape the Germans. The rumor was that the Russians had closed the border, and would not admit any more refugees, but we refused to believe it. We heard about a place where it was possible to cross the river Bug by boat to the Russian side.

Early next morning, we set out on foot for a village on the river. We found some villagers who were willing to take us across for a fee. After some negotiations, the peasants took us to a place where rowboats were tied up. We boarded two rowboats, and in a matter of minutes, reached the Russian side.

When we climbed the bank, we found ourselves on a vast, flat, open, grassy field. In the distance, about 6 or 7 kilometers away, was a small town - our destination. Finally, a safe place was in sight, away from the Germans. As we walked in the direction of the town, we spotted something in the distance bobbing up and down. As we continued walking, it came closer, and we realized it was a Russian soldier on a horse riding across the field, headed directly toward us. We continued walking at the same pace, hoping he would let us go to that town in the distance. When he reached us, he started talking in a loud voice, pointing in the direction of the river. He told us to go back. Mother started pleading with him, but he insisted we return to the German side. Reluctantly, and dejectedly, we turned around and started walking back with the mounted Russian soldier following behind us. We reached the spot where the rowboats were tied up on the other side of the river. A few peasants had been observing this scene. The soldier yelled across to the peasants, telling them to take us back. Two rowboats returned us to the German side. This was a devastating setback. The border was really closed!

We returned to a small town, where many other refugees were waiting for news on the border crossings. People were faced with a real dilemma. They could not return home, and they could not cross the border. The mood was gloomy. Mother was seeking reliable information on the latest border

situation. She heard that one border crossing point might be open for a few days. We set out for it.

It was late in the day, but we were determined to get there before the last border-crossing point would close.

We started walking in the direction of the border. At dusk, we picked up a dirt road which ran along the river for some distance, and then gradually left the river and continued through open fields.

It was now completely dark. Faint intermittent voices started to reach us. They became louder as we continued walking. Soon we could see a twinkling light in the distance. It was an isolated farm house. As we got closer, we heard a woman's scream, obviously in distress. Then we heard boisterous laughter and German voices. A military truck was parked near the house. It looked like German soldiers were inside..

We stopped. Mother told us to be completely silent and slowly, we resumed walking.

Fortunately for us, the house was somewhat removed from the road, and we passed the area without being noticed..

The combination of the woman's screams and noisy voices from German soldiers produced paralyzing fear. Again, we were reminded how vulnerable we were at all times, wherever we went.

Fortunately we encountered few Germans since we left Pultusk. There were no Germans even at the Russian border.

When we reached a cluster of farm houses, mother knocked on a door and asked if we could spend the night there. The farmer led us to a shed with straw where we spent the night.

We resumed our journey on foot early the next morning.

When we arrived at the border, we found a very discouraging scene: hundreds of refugees camped out in the open on a railroad bed, waiting for the border to open up. Some of them had been there for several days, and were prepared for a long wait. A cool October night was approaching, and none of us was dressed warmly enough to spend the night outside. We didn't have any food. Mother went over to the Russian guards, told them of our precarious situation, and begged them to let us go to the village across the border. They told her the border was closed because of trouble-makers and spies among the refugees earlier permitted to cross to the Russian side.

Mother persisted. She told them she was without a husband and with seven young children, and no trouble-makers in her family. It was already dusk. Finally they relented. They told her to get the children, and directed us to a tree-lined dirt road leading to the village. Other refugees saw us crossing and many surged forward, trying to follow us. The soldiers got agitated and summoned more soldiers, forcing the crowd, including us, to move back.

People were settling down for the night. Mother returned to the border guards and pleaded with them. She refused to give up. It was already dark, when, miraculously, the soldiers again allowed us to cross the border. We walked toward a faint light in the distance, to the nearest house. Mother entered the house, and came out with good news. The peasant would allow us to spend the night with them. It was like a dream. Only a half hour ago, we were facing a night in the cold, hungry, and in constant fear of the men in German uniforms. And now a sympathetic peasant welcomed us into his warm house and fed us. We wondered what would happen to the hundreds of refugees camped on the border less than one kilometer away.

DISPERSAL OF THE FAMILY

We left German-occupied Poland, and were now in the part occupied by the Russians. Our situation had greatly improved. Our lives were no longer threatened.

We set out east, away from the border. We reached the city of Grodno, and went directly to the synagogue for the night. The next day, mother roamed the city looking for a place to stay. She did not find anything. Refugees had occupied all available housing and many were homeless.

We left Grodno and went farther east to Lakhovici, a small town near the city of Baranovici. There we found a permanent place to live - a room in a peasant's house. It had a dirt floor and a little wood-burning stove for cooking, and to keep us warm during the cold winter months.

My older brother Shymon, only thirteen years old, decided to leave us, and try to make a life of his own. Mother was concerned, but she did not try to stop him; he had always been independent. We later received a letter from him with a picture of himself in a uniform. He was a student in a trade school in Grodno. There he received room and board, and an education to prepare him for an independent life.

Many of the refugees had immediate family members stranded on the German side, because the border was closed. We were thinking of father, and wondered whether, by some miracle, we would ever see him again. Since it was not possible to cross the border from the German to the Russian side, some refugees considered returning to the German side to reunite with their families. The Russian authorities informed all refugees seeking to return to the German side to register with them. All others were advised to take out passports and become permanent Russian residents.

Sometime later, at dawn, Russian soldiers arrested all refugees who did not take out Russian passports, and took them away in trucks. They were declared "enemies of the Soviet Union," and exiled to Siberia. Among them was our Aunt with two small children, who wanted to return to the German side to look for her lost husband. A few months later, we received a letter from her, somewhere in Siberia. She wrote of the extreme cold, the hard work and lack of food. We sent her a package of food, but never heard from her again. Luckily, mother had taken out a Russian passport, so we were allowed to remain in Lakhovici.

There was no assistance of any kind available for refugees. Mother was working odd jobs. The local government gave her a temporary job sorting tomatoes in a basement. Sometimes she would bring home half-rotten tomatoes. Even that was a treat for us. One day, she returned from work early. She was very distressed; she was spitting up blood. She suspected tuberculosis. A visit to the doctor confirmed it. Mother was unable to continue to support six children and herself.

In her desparate search for help, mother decided to write to the Gorodenka city government to look for father's family. Several weeks later, a letter arrived from a sister with a picture of herself. She was an attractive, well-dressed young woman. Mother wrote to her to tell her about our desparate situation, with the hope that she might offer some help. We never heard from her again. We learned very little about her, and the lack of response deepened the mystery. We could only speculate that she might have been among those exiled to Siberia.

Mother went to the local government to seek help, but they couldn't do anything for her. They suggested she give up the children to an orphanage, but she did not want to do that. She was told a mother with seven or more children might be entitled to assistance from the government in Moscow. We wrote President Kalinin in Moscow requesting assistance as a family with seven children. A few months later, a letter from Moscow arrived. With excitement and hope, mother opened the letter. The reply stated that because the children were born outside the borders of the Soviet Union, the family was not entitled to assistance under the program. Mother didn't know what else she could do.

The best solution to the dilemma facing her was to place the two youngest children in an orphanage, where they would receive decent care. Benjamin, three years old, and Rachel, five years old were both taken to an orphanage in Grodno. I later visited the orphanage with mother, and it was obvious the children were receiving excellent care. We also visited brother Shymon at the trade school in the same city. Because the orphanage was for children up to the age of five, Rachel was later transferred to an orphanage for older children in Bialystok.

Mother's condition did not improve; the medical care she needed was not available. Four children still lived with her and needed to be fed and cared for.

it was very difficult for mother to cope with the situation, so she made arrangements for my sisters Lea and Sima, and me to go to an orphanage. The three of us went to the same orphanage in Berezhno, a village on the river Neman, near the town of Mir. The building was somewhat removed from the village, adjacent to the river, an ideal country setting. We were bathed, given new clothing, a clean bed in a large communal room for the boys, and a separate room for the girls. We were fed three decent meals a day, and a snack before bedtime - a plate of noodles with warm milk. We were fortunate to have such good care. I was thinking of my oldest brother Shalom and mother, probably cold and hungry in Lakhovici.

A Russian official in a military uniform was visiting the orphanage. We were introduced to him as the latest addition to the home. He asked me: "What is your name?" I said : "Shlomo." He replied : "What kind of a name is Shlomo? Your name is now Sasha!" And so, Sasha became my name.

My sisters and I immediately started to attend the village school, located close to the orphanage. I was placed in the third grade. It was the middle of the school year. The Russian third grade was the equivalent of Polish fourth grade. Russian was still a foreign language to me, but as the year progressed, it became easier, and soon, routine.

Spring was approaching. The snow was melting; we could look out our window and see ice breaking up on the frozen river. Soon the river overflowed its banks, creating a huge lake. It was a beautiful sight.

I quickly adjusted to life in the orphanage, and made friends there. The end of the school year was approaching. We had the same teacher for all classes. The final exams started; the last test scheduled was arithmetic. For the last part of the test, we were given a word problem. The teacher announced two students in the class had all "A" grades and one "B" grade. The student who would finish the word problem first with the correct answer would get the "B" grade changed to an "A." I was one of those two students, with a "B" in History. I finished the problem first and had the correct answer. The "B" in History was changed to an "A," and I finished at the top of the class with all "A's."

SUMMER CAMP

I was informed two students from the orphanage would be selected to go to summer camp for the entire month of June. A girl from the second grade and I were chosen. One day a lady woke us before dawn. We took our bundles with a few personal belongings and boarded a horse-drawn wagon for the trip to the railroad station. The lady boarded the train, accompanied us and delivered us to the summer camp on Lake Naroch. I did not even say good bye to my sisters, as I anticipated seeing them again in one month.

It was a "Pioneers Camp" (the equivalent of boy scouts and girl scouts).

It was located on the shores of Lake Naroch, surrounded by forests. There were probably several hundred children of all ages. The day would start with calisthenics, then a wonderful breakfast. After breakfast, we would assemble outdoors in a military-like formation, arranged by different age groups. The authorities would announce a program for the day. The concluding part of the morning assembly was the singing of popular songs. After the formal assembly, we would participate in various outdoor activities, or play war-like games of hide and seek in the woods. All the children were involved in some organized activity the entire day. Between lunch and dinner we would go to the dining room for milk and cookies, followed by a mandatory nap. An adult was present to make sure every child lay on the right side, in complete silence.

This kind of luxurious life was new to me. I had never been to summer camp before. The same routine was repeated daily.

THE SURPRISE ATTACK

On June 22, 1941, in the morning as we were preparing for our routine assembly, adults were moving faster than usual, and they looked serious. As usual, the authorities assembled on the outdoor stage. They appeared somber, and they seemed to whisper to each other a lot. The Camp Director announced that at four o'clock in the morning, the Germans had launched a surprise attack across the entire border, and bombed many cities. We were at war with Germany! The news was devastating. All the terrible things I had experienced from the Germans flashed through my mind. How would I get back to mother? How would my brothers and sisters, scattered in different places, return to mother? Would we wind up again under the cruel German rule?

The camp administration attempted to continue with the normal daily routine, but the situation was not the same. The adults shared with us constantly changing rumors and speculation. The primary question was what to do with the children. One rumor was we would be moved to the island in Lake Naroch, away from potential battle areas. Returning the children to their homes was impossible. Transportation systems were disrupted. The Camp Director tried to get help from his superiors in the capital city of Belarus, Minsk, but was unsuccessful. He was looking for a way to evacuate the children to the east, away from the approaching front lines.

The next day, June 23rd, we were taken to the railroad station in Vileyka. The situation at the station was deceptively quiet. A few soldiers were scattered, lying on the ground, with light machine guns in the ready position. We were loaded into empty freight cars with two levels of wooden shelves for sleeping. They were intended for military personnel. The train had armed soldiers on the top to protect us from air attacks. The rumors were that our Camp Director had a very heated argument with the military authorities in charge at the railroad station. He had demanded a train to evacuate the children, but the military insisted the railroad cars were needed for the troops. The Director insisted the troops could fight, but the children could not. He also pointed out that many of us were children of very high government officials. That argument apparently worked.

The train slowly started to move. There was no civilian activity at the station, only scattered military personnel were seen, waiting for the enemy. I wondered what fate awaited those soldiers. The train was moving east, though no one knew the destination. We were moving away from the front line. Soon after we left the station, we heard two bursts of machine gun fire. We assumed that our guards had fired at an enemy plane.

As we rolled along, the country scenes looked quiet and peaceful, as peasants worked their fields. The soldiers were no longer on top of our train; we were safe even from air attacks. Every time we reached a larger station, our train would be maneuvered back and forth to allow military traffic to move toward the front. The food on the train was still good and adequate. It all came from our summer camp supplies. There were about 40 boys and one adult man in our rail car. We all slept on the makeshift wooden shelves. We would spend most of the day watching the endless passing fields.

A makeshift wooden bench at the wide open door accommodated 7 or 8 people. It was the only space from which the outdoors could be seen. As we moved further east, those children close to their homes were removed from the train and taken to their homes. After about two weeks on the train, the children from our car, and some others were taken to our new home. It was a large wooden house, situated on the edge of a forest, in a small village of the Mordovian Autonomous Republic. That became our new home. The all-woman staff, like the children, had come from Western regions, where the war was raging.

Life in our new home was structured somewhat like the summer camp. The children were organized into platoons by age. The platoon was broken down into four squads. Leaders from within the groups were appointed, and assigned responsibility for their members. I was selected as one of the squad leaders in our platoon. The day would start with a formal assembly. The news from the front was read to us, and some of the items would be explained and discussed. The news was depressingly similar everyday. The Red Army retreated, and a list of cities, abandoned to the Germans, would be read to us.

It was still summer vacation, and there was no formal school yet. But we were always kept busy; preparing firewood for winter, helping the collective farm harvest the potato crop, performing other farming chores. Most of the men had already been called into military service. Women did all the work, and the children had to help, especially with the harvesting of crops before freezing weather arrived.

At special meetings, our educators would read and discuss articles from the newspaper Pravda. A frequent topic was the 1939 USSR-German Non-agression Pact. The political campaign to explain and justify the pact lasted for many weeks. The goal was to convince the public that the pact was signed to gain time to prepare for the inevitable war with Germany. I'm not sure the public believed that argument. The events of the war indicated complete lack of preparation. Sometimes a military person would lecture on the care and use of a rifle. We learned how to disassemble a rifle, clean it and re-assemble it. We practiced war games in the woods using wooden rifles and dummy grenades. We were being trained to defend ourselves. I was thirteen years old, one of the older children in the group.

The news from the front continued to be bad. There was constant talk of spies and enemy agents in the area, and the need to be vigilant. One evening, the sky lit up; there was a forest fire near the village. Speculation was that the fire was set by enemy agents. Adults from the village, including the staff from the orphanage, were being organized to fight the fire. I asked the staff to let me go along, and they agreed to take me with them. A local man from the village led us through the woods in the darkness in the direction of the fire.

I was surprised how fast we reached the fire line. It was much closer to the village than I expected.

Many were already there, calmly organizing people and assigning tasks to individuals. Men were cutting long flexible branches from bushes, and bundling them together into the shape of a broom. I was given one of these brooms, taken to a spot on the fire line, and instructed to beat the burning grass with the broom until the fire was extinguished. A human chain with makeshift brooms, beating the grass, was an amazingly simple and effective technique. At dawn, with the fire under control, we went home, completely exhausted. Many remained to see that the fire did not flare up again.

Not all the news was filtered down to the children through our educators. A loud speaker was mounted on the wall in the largest room of our house (our sleeping area). It had a direct connection with the public radio system, remotely controlled from somewhere outside. Whenever there was important news, the speaker would come alive. Most of the time the news would be a review of the latest developments on the front. Occasionally, an announcer would repeat for several minutes, "Stand by for important news."

All the adults and the older children would gather around the speaker. Finally, it was announced that Stalin would soon address the nation. His voice was emotionless and monotonous. The quality of transmission was poor; it was difficult to understand every word, but we could get the gist of the speech.

He would always end the speech with: "Our cause is just! The enemy will be destroyed! Victory will be ours!"

School started on schedule, and I was now attending the fourth grade. In addition to the basic subjects, the curriculum included a foreign language: German. The fourth grade stayed together as a group for all classes, but we had different teachers for every subject.

I vividly remember our World Geography teacher. When we studied The United States of America, she told us about her 1924 trip to Chicago. She was especially impressed with the tour of the stockyards. She told us, in some detail, how a live cow went in one end, and processed products came out the other end with nothing wasted, not even the hooves.

She radiated admiration and enthusiasm for the U.S.A. when she talked about it.

After school in the orphanage, we had about 2 to 3 hours of scheduled homework. The educators monitored us, and provided help to those who needed it. A group of students would share one well-used text book. Writing paper was in short supply; but homework was always done. Sometimes we used old newspapers for writing paper.

When the first snow fell, it left a solid white blanket on the ground. it was a beautiful sight. The snow was piling up deeper and deeper; it never melted. The only clothing we had was what we brought with us from summer camp. Fortunately, we only had a short walk to school. On really cold days, it was freezing even inside the school building, but classes were never cancelled. The orphanage had one big wood stove for the entire house. The fire was going day and night, all winter long, and it was still cold. We elevated our cots almost all the way to the ceiling, where the air was somewhat warmer. The local residents said the 1941-1942 winter was the coldest in many years.

We received a rationed portion of bread in the morning for the entire day, some hot cereal with vegetable oil for breakfast, and cabbage soup for dinner. Usually, for a national holiday, we would be treated to small specks of meat in the soup. We were always trying to guess whether it was beef, rabbit or horse meat. Hunger was a part of our daily life. Life for adults was more difficult. As children, we received preferential treatment. These conditions existed for so long that to us, it became normal. Morale was boosted by good news from the front. For the first time since the war started, the German Army was retreating. We considered ourselves fortunate to be here, safe, away from the battle areas.

The weather gradually turned warmer and water would drip from the roof lines during the middle of the day, forming long icicles in the afternoon; and they would start dripping again the next day. The walkways in the snow were getting slushy; soon they turned wet and remained that way. Walking became awkward. Sometimes the hard icy surface would break under body weight and one's foot would sink deep into the slush. The signs of spring were a welcome change after such a long, severe winter.

As the weather became warmer, the news from the front turned mixed. The Red Army was again retreating.

The newspaper carried stories of atrocities committed by the Germans against the civilian population. I suspected the Jewish population was being treated very harshly, based on my experience under German rule in Poland, less than two years ago.

When summer vacation came, we again helped the farms with various tasks in the field. Weeding was a major part of the work during the early growing season. The orphanage staff would plan our needs for the next winter months. The older children participated in cutting, chopping and stacking firewood. It became obvious the war would not end soon. What was supposed to have been a temporary stay in The Mordovian ASSR, became a permanent home.

The staff was planning to go out in the field for an entire week to cut hay. I asked to go with them, and after some discussion, they agreed to take me along. I performed the same tasks as the adults. I learned to cut grass with a scythe, helped turn over the grass to dry in the sun, raked it and collected it into small hay stacks. We all slept in a large tent. We would sing songs, or someone would tell stories until we would fall asleep. It was hard work, but it was fun to have a different routine, and most of all, I enjoyed being with adults.

We had borrowed a horse from a farm to help us with raking the hay. After work was completed, I volunteered to take the horse back to the farm. I assured the staff I knew how to ride a horse. I nervously mounted the bare-back horse, and headed across the fields for the bridge. I could see the farm across the river, but I couldn't find the bridge, and it was getting late. I decided to let the horse walk across the river. I undressed, tightly bundled my clothes, and started the crossing. The river turned out to be deeper than I thought. Less and less of the horse was above water, until only his head was showing. I was beginning to worry, when I realized the horse was swimming. I didn't know a horse could swim. I was relieved when the horse reached the other side of the river and started walking. We had made it across! I put on my wet clothes, and delivered the horse to the farm. The farmers showed me a shortcut to the bridge. On the way out, I saw a large tray with crumpled farmer's cheese spread out to dry in the sun. I had not seen any kind of cheese since we arrived here, so I sneaked a handful and ate it. It was already dark when I returned to our camp.

I wound up with sores on my bottom, and had trouble walking for the following two weeks from the inexperienced bare-back ride on the horse. But the experience of riding a horse for the first time in my life made it all worth while.

One day, after cutting grass all day, I went fishing in the nearby river. I sensed something heavy pulling on my line. After some struggle, I landed a good-sized catfish. Filled with excitement, I rushed to camp in time to add the fish to the soup for dinner. The fishing line I used was made from the flexible switch from a bush; the line was from a horse's tail; and the hook belonged to a man in our party. I was the hero of the day.

To mark our last day in the field, the cook managed to produce an extra good dinner. It even included pieces of meat in the soup. He also produced a teapot full of moonshine vodka. The staff were debating whether to give me some. I told them I would like to taste it, so they gave me some. I really did not like it, but I drank it. I tried to impress the staff that I was old enough to work and drink with them. It was a great week for me; I was beginning to feel more like an adult than a child.

During the summer of 1942, orphanage boys fourteen and older were sent to factories to replace men called to the military. I was one of these older boys, just turned fourteen, but I was allowed to stay in the orphanage. Our summer routine remained pretty much the same. We spent many days working in the fields, helping at the collective farm. In return, the orphanage received potatoes, cabbage and occasionally some milk. We had the usual sessions to discuss the military situation at the front. We had gymnastics workshops, and the group participated in a variety show for the residents in a nearby town. A military instructor came again to teach us how to strip, clean and re-assemble a rifle. We played war games and practiced throwing dummy hand grenades. The program was intended to prepare us to defend ourselves in the event the front reached our area.

I started fifth grade in September. It was much more challenging and interesting than the fourth grade. In addition to the basic courses, we had beginning Algebra, History of the Middle Ages, and German for a foreign language. The only paper we had to write on was old newspapers or old magazines, and even that was in short supply.

We were better prepared for winter weather than the previous year. The children were given new warm overcoats and felt boots for the winter snows. However, the food situation deteriorated. During the 1942-1943 winter, we experienced severe shortages in everything. As usual, we received our daily ration of bread in the morning, But, to make the flour go further, the bread contained hard-to-swallow indigestible grain husk. The main meal consisted of a watery potato soup, and a spoonful of hot cereal. Hunger was still a constant companion.

During that harsh winter, I became ill and was confined to bed for about two weeks. I had boil-like sores all over my legs. It was extremely painful when I put weight on my legs, so I had to stay off my feet. A nurse practitioner diagnosed it as "Spotty Rheumatism." There was also speculation that it may have been the result of malnutrition. Fortunately, the condition cleared up and never recurred.

During the latter part of the winter, firewood was in short supply. During the really cold days, we would tear boards from buildings such as sheds and use them for firewood. The news from the front in the winter of 1943 was much better; The Germans were retreating again. Every day the radio would announce the cities liberated by the Red Army. They surrounded a large German force in Stalingrad. It became a major story, closely followed and discussed, until the German General Paulus and his army surrendered. The event was celebrated as a major victory, and the turning point in the war. I was beginning to believe in the eventual liberation of the areas where my mother, brothers and sisters lived when the war started in June 1941. I was wondering:

Were sisters Lea and Sima still in my orphanage in Berezhno?
Was my baby brother Benjamin still in the orphanage in Grodno?
Was my little sister Rachel still in the orphanage in Bialystok?
Was brother Shymon still in trade school in Grodno?
Were my mother and brother Shalom still in Lakhovici?
How did the German occupation affect their lives?

I followed the news intently, and longed to see familiar names of towns in western Belarus. Spring of 1943 was a hopeful period. For the first time, we dared think we soon might return to our "homes."

The orphanage was again asked to provide fourteen year-old boys to factories. There was a severe shortage of able-bodied men in all areas of civilian life. I believed I was allowed to continue school because of my good grades.

Routinely, in the evening, all children went to bed at the scheduled time, in a large room. The educator in charge turned off the light at official bedtime, and remained there until everybody was asleep. On a warm balmy summer evening, after turning in, Anna, the educator in charge, came over and sat on my bed. We talked quietly for a while, then she got up and left. I enjoyed the attention. She did the same thing the next time she was on duty. The warm nights were not conducive to sleep, so I looked forward to Anna's visits, and I enjoyed talking to her. One evening we talked longer than during her previous visits. All the children were long asleep. Anna lay down next to me, and the inevitable happened. I felt it was a completely normal event between us; I was fifteen years old and Anna was twenty four. It developed into a close but secret relationship.

In mid-summer, Anna told me she had been ordered to return to her home town Sumy, in the Ukraine, which had been recently liberated from the Germans. They needed her for a position in the Sumy school system. She also told me at that time there had been discussion about sending me to a factory, but she had persuaded the director to allow me to stay at the orphanage, so I could go to the sixth grade. Anna promised to keep in touch with me. She wrote as soon as she arrived in Sumy, and continued regularly.

I entered the sixth grade in September. Later in the fall, I was notified I was being sent to Ruzayevka to attend a railroad trade school. I felt that entering a trade school would end my status as a child , and would be a good transition on the road to adulthood and independence.

THE "TRADE SCHOOL"

When I arrived at my new home in Ruzayevka, I experienced a real cultural shock. The home did not resemble a school in any sense of the word. The school was only in the process of being organized. Young boys from various areas in the region were recruited to populate the school. We were assigned to dormitory-type buildings for the duration of our training period. There was no furniture in the dormitory, and the building was completely empty. Our first activity was to produce frames for beds to meet our own needs. We cut tubing with a hacksaw, bent it into shapes to form the footboard and headboard, and welded the various parts together to form the frame for a bed. The result was a primitive, but functional product. It was excellent on-the-job training. The tools we used, such as hacksaws and files, were old and of poor quality. All the better manufacturing materials had been directed toward military needs. There was no supervision; discipline was poor, and the "students" were left to cope as best they could. The few personal possessions (clothing I brought from the orphanage) were stolen. Stealing seemed to be a way of life for many. There was no classroom work or any other formal instruction of any kind. We learned from an experienced craftsman, who would circulate to each individual to demonstrate the correct use of each tool.

A shipment of badly needed and scarce soap arrived for the trade school. Only the newly arrived boys from the orphanage were asked to help with the transfer of the soap from the railroad station to the school. The others could not be trusted. We went as a group, accompanied by three adults to protect us from being attacked by the other boys to take away the soap. Stolen goods would be sold on the black market. The stores did not have any goods for sale, except for strictly rationed basic food items. It was a rough environment. I realized life in the orphanage had been very sheltered and privileged. The future in the trade school looked pretty bleak. When I communicated these feelings in my letters to Anna, she suggested I join her in Sumy.

I didn't take Anna's invitation seriously. Sumy was probably a thousand kilometers from Ruzayevka; travel was limited and strictly controlled. Official authorization and documentation was required to buy tickets for railroad travel, the only mode of transportation available. I would have needed authorization to leave the trade school, or at least written permission to go

on such a trip. I had no money for a railroad ticket; and I was very reluctant to go to Sumy, without a specific goal, and be dependent on Anna. I was still hoping the situation in the trade school would improve. However, there were no signs of any change, and no steps taken toward the establishment of a real school.

A move to Sumy became the only available alternative that made sense to me. Anna was the only contact I had, and the only person I could trust. I thought Sumy might provide an opportunity for some improvement over my present situation. There was absolutely no way for me to get official authorization in order to make the move. I finally decided to take off on Sunday, our only day off work, and hop on the first train going west. I did need money, I took the sheet and pillow case from my bed, hid it under my jacket, and walked out of the building. Around the corner, I tried to spread it out under my jacket, so I could walk down the street without attracting attention. I was on my way to sell it on the black market, when suddenly, the building custodian appeared and searched me. Someone had obviously informed on me. The custodian called the police and reported he was holding me with stolen government property. The police showed up and took me away to jail.

IN JAIL

The cell was about 20 feet by 20 feet. A wooden shelf, about four feet off the floor served as a sleeping area for some prisoners. The others slept on the concrete floor. The cell was occupied by about forty prisoners, most of them waiting to be transferred to a more permanent prison. There was no bedding, not even a blanket. A slop bucket, with some water in it, served as a toilet.

At age 15, I was by far the youngest prisoner in the cell. I found myself a spot on the cement floor for my sleeping area. One of the prisoners yelled at me to get up, and ordered another prisoner to give up his place on the shelf, the preferred sleeping area, to me. We both did as we were told. It looked like he was the leader in the cell; and no one dared question him. The prisoners questioned me as to why they put me in jail. When I told them my story, they told me my offense called for three years in prison. To me, three years in prison was like a life sentence. It was a devastating turn of events.

I settled down on the wooden shelf for the night. We were laid out like sardines in a can; there was no space between bodies. I lay awake thinking about my predicament, and imagining all kinds of potential scenarios of my future life in prison. Something started biting me all over; and I realized lice had invaded my entire body.

The next morning, we received our ration of bread for the day, and a bowl of hot water. Later in the day, for the main meal, we received watery soup. A newly arrived prisoner took out a raw potato from his little sack and ate it as if it were an apple. Only I thought that unusual; everybody else ignored it. The man said he had been in prison for eighteen years, and was being transferred to another prison. One prisoner commented that my name, Katz, was an unusual name. He asked me what kind of a name it was, and I replied I didn't know. Fortunately, he did not pursue the subject. Anti-semitic comments crept into every conversation; and it was best not to be identified as a Jew.

The second day, the guard opened the door and called out my name. A policeman, armed with a rifle, was waiting for me. He told me he was taking me to court for the trial. He walked me through the streets of the city, with his rifle in the ready position, as if I were a dangerous criminal. We arrived in a

large, plain room with chairs set up for the public, and a table and chairs on a small stage. A few people were sitting in the chairs, and a policeman guarded the door. My guard inquired about the case and returned to say we would have to wait. He left and returned several times. Finally, he returned to say the judge was too busy to take up my case that day. The policeman, rifle in hand, led me back to the jail to wait for the day when my case would come up again. The fact I was a prisoner became more real as the armed policeman led me through the streets, and I realized everybody in sight was free except me.

On the fourth day, the cell door opened; and my name was called again. To my surprise, a lady in a military uniform, an official from the trade school whom I had met before, was waiting for me. A few weeks earlier, when I had been in the sickroom confined to bed with malaria, this lady came to visit me. She brought me a letter from Anna and we talked for a few minutes. The lady told me she had come to take me back to the trade school. Without any police escort, she took me to an office on the upper floor of the same building. A middle-aged lady sat at a bare table, and asked us to join her. The police lady started the conversation by telling me I had committed a crime, and went on to explain what the punishment would be in my case. The conversation was conducted in a rather friendly, but firm way, as if she were a social worker and a police woman at the same time.

The concluding comment was, "Since you are very young, and it is your first offense, and you promise to behave, I agreed to the request of this lady to release you into her custody." I couldn't believe what was happening until the lady and I were out the door, well on the way to the trade school. That was the best thing that had happened to me in a very long time. I got a second chance! I was very grateful to the lady from the trade school.

I immediately went to a public bath. I took off all my clothes, tied them in a bundle and gave them to a man for de-lousing. While I was in the shower, my clothes were placed in a specially designed oven with the temperature hot enough to kill the lice. The de-loused clothing was ready when I came out of the shower.

The situation in the trade school had not changed. I was determined more than ever to go to Sumy. Two weeks after I was released from jail, I hopped on a train heading west. The railroad stations were always full of people waiting for a train. Some people would wait for days, until a train would go in the desired direction. The military, and its massive continuous need for the war effort, was the primary user of the railroad system. Apparently, there were no scheduled trains for the general public. Illegal or unofficial travelers like myself, would wait for the train to start moving, then hop on it, away from the designated boarding area. Many homeless young boys made the trains and train stations their home. They lived from stealing whatever was handy, and by picking pockets.

I started out from Ruzayevka riding in the small, open platform between railroad cars. The spot provided some protection from the constant wind of the moving train. It was also convenient to jump off when the train made a stop at a station, and to hop back on when the train moved out again. The chances of being kicked off the train or being arrested were much greater at the stations, where police were always present. At night, we would climb up on top of the rail car. it was the best place to lie down and get some sleep; and it was easier to escape detection, even during station stops. The cool fall nights and the wind on top of a moving train made it pretty cold. During the day, we would return to the platforms between cars, or, sometimes on a passenger train, we would ride on the steps.

I did not eat anything for the first two days; my major concern was to avoid arrest. On the third day, I filled my stomach with hard raw corn. A fellow traveler, about my age named Uri, made an opening in a sack with a razor blade, and corn came pouring out. We both filled our pockets. Uri and I became friends, and decided to stick together. Uri had been traveling like that for months. He knew how to get along without money.

Once we were riding a passenger train, and we had to keep moving to avoid being caught by the conductor, as he checked for tickets. I found myself with a young man on the same platform between cars. He was older than me, and he looked like a tough guy. He looked me over, and I thought he would ask for money, but he demanded we exchange overcoats. I gave him my nice neat overcoat

I had from the orphanage, and he gave me his shaggy sheepskin overcoat. I probably would have resisted the demand if Uri had been with me. To avoid detection by the conductor, Uri and I would separate when riding trains. I did not want to risk being cut by a razor blade (a favored weapon), or being pushed off the moving train. Without saying a word, he disappeared with my coat at the first stop. His coat was large on me, but it was warm.

The train pulled into Kharkov, the second largest city in the Ukraine. Uri and I teamed up with a third guy about our age. The three of us explored the station, and decided to leave; there were too many policemen. The threat of being picked up was very likely. We hopped on a train, and in a few hours, ended up in Poltava, another large city in the Ukraine. We were going to explore the station, but a policeman came over and ordered us to follow him. A mob of people were scrambling, trying to board a passenger train. As we passed this scene, the new member of our trio picked up a large, steaming metal teapot sitting between some luggage, and continued walking behind the policeman. He took us to the police station, directed us to an adjacent room and told us to wait there. The teapot was full of hot cereal. We took turns eating out of the teapot cover, without a spoon. It was the first time we had had hot food in weeks. When the policeman questioned us, he found out we were homeless, transient young men, like many others throughout the area. Apparently, there was no routine solution for our case. The police had more serious problems to worry about. He released us and told us to leave the area.

The arrest in Poltava brought me back to reality. The next arrest might not result in such a lucky ending. I had a choice of continuing the life of a vagrant with my two friends, which could only lead to trouble, or going to Anna. Sumy was only about 200 kilometers away, a few hours by train. I had been in the area for several days, and was still somewhat reluctant to go to Anna. I had been riding trains for weeks, a good part of the time on the top of rail cars. The soot from the coal-burning locomotives permeated my clothing; and it was impossible to get rid of it completely. I was reluctant to go to Anna in this condition; however, I was realistic enough to know I had little choice. The arrest in Poltava gave me the incentive and the courage I needed. I hopped a train for Sumy.

MY STAY WITH ANNA

I arrived in Sumy the same day, and found my way to Anna's address. It was late in the day. I found Anna in front of the house, working in her vegetable garden. She was surprised, but glad to see me. I had not communicated with her for about two months. She commented how skinny and dirty I looked. Before entering the house, Anna told me that, in addition to her mother, an aunt with two teenage children also lived there. I would stay at the house with them until we found a more permanent place for me. We entered the house; and she introduced me as one of her former students from the orphanage from Mordovia.

It was a single-family residence on a good-sized lot with a low picket fence around the entire property, located on a small residential street. Anna's mother occupied one room, the aunt with her two children occupied a second room; and Anna occupied the third room. The only room not used for sleeping was the kitchen. The kitchen, as a place to sleep was not practical, so Anna suggested I sleep on the floor in her room. It seemed like a reasonable arrangement in a crowded house, for the short time I would stay there. I was treated like a distant relative; it was hard to tell how Anna's family felt about the arrangement. I ate with them, and helped with chores around the house.

Sumy residents were given plots of land on the outskirts of the city for growing food to augment their meager rationed food supply. On Sunday, I went with Anna to tend her plot of land planted with potatoes. This was their supply for the winter. I saw Anna in a new, completely different light from that in the orphanage. She performed hard, physical labor all day long. She appeared to be the head of the household. It made me feel a little better, to be able to contribute in some small way. Anna truly treated me like part of the family; she even made sure I got some extra food, as she put it, "to put some flesh on your bones." One day Anna took me to her office and introduced me to her friends and co-workers. Some people took me for her brother; there was actually a resemblance.

The house Anna lived in was used by the German military during the occupation period. Anna was still in the process of cleaning up around the house. I was helping clean a small storage area. As Anna was going through the junk in a wooden trunk, she found a small container with

three condoms in it. She wanted to throw it away, but I took the container and put it in my sheepskin coat pocket. I did not use the coat; but it was stored in a closet. A few days later, Anna told me she had some bad news. Her mother had found the condoms in my coat pocket, and was very upset. When I returned to the house, her mother displayed her unhappiness with a continuous stream of comments about my sleeping in her daughter's room. She did not address anyone in particular; she simply aired her feelings in a loud voice for everyone to hear. Everyone else in the house was silent. I slept in the kitchen the next night. My continued presence in the house created a very awkward situation. Only my departure would return the household to normal. Anna and I discussed possible alternatives available to me. The quickest solution would be for me to get a job in a factory.

I had no identification papers; therefore, the first step was to get some. The German occupation left intense anti-semitism in the area, so Anna suggested I take a Russian name. I wanted to retain some of my own identity, so I simply changed Katz to Katzoff. it was a simple matter for me to get an identification and assume a new identity. Anna made arrangements for me to go to work in a factory in Achtyrka, a town not too far from Sumy.

My new identity solved the immediate problems but also caused future complications.

IN ACHTYRKA

I arrived in Achtyrka by train and was glad to be independent again. I reported to the factory, where I was assigned to a small barracks-like building, my new home. The large room contained approximately thirty cots, arranged in two rows about twenty inches apart. The occupants were all young men, recruited from other areas of the region. I was one of the youngest in the group. Very few factories or shops were in working order when the area was liberated. Almost everything had to be organized from scratch, including the factory to which I was assigned. The factory already had a staff of supervisors and a few skilled tradesmen transferred from other factories. One young lady had just returned from serving a six month jail sentence for leaving her job in another factory. We, and some local unskilled young men and women, were the workers to be trained on the job, as needed to perform the assigned tasks. There was already a functioning shop in the main two-story building. The lower floor was the machine shop; and the upper floor was lined with work benches equipped with vises, one at each work station.

My first assignment was to produce a bracket from a flat steel bar, using a hacksaw, a chisel and a file. The bracket was for a small table-type scale (the type that uses standard weights on one side to balance a product on the other side). Every part of the scale was produced by hand, from steel bars to sheet metal. The tools were old and worn out, but we managed to produce the first functional product to come out of the factory. We worked six days a week, and sometimes we spent the seventh day doing mandatory "volunteer" work, without pay, helping with the construction of a new building. The work process was primitive and inefficient; consequently, the end product was of poor quality. But we learned the basic skills by performing the task over and over, and the scales were much needed items in the new consumer stores.

One morning there was excitement in the factory. We all gathered around an opened crate with a brand new lathe which had just arrived from America. Everybody marvelled at the built-in features for precision work, the fine finish, and even the complete set of high quality tools. There was tremendous admiration for American technology.

The workers received meal coupons for use in the factory cafeteria. The quantity and quality of the food was somewhat better than the food in previous places.

Sometimes we were even treated with scrambled eggs, made from American powdered eggs, supplied under the "Lend Lease" program. Outside of the basic food rations, no food or other goods were available in the stores. An unofficial outdoor, or black market existed where some goods were available at very high prices. One needed much more than the salary we received to buy on the unofficial private market. People used various ways to obtain money to pay for something they wanted to buy from private sources, whether it was food or second-hand clothing. New clothing was not available at all.

One day we were told to attend a trial, held in the factory, for one of the young men in our dormitory. He was accused of slashing four tires on a trailer, taking out the inner tubes and selling them. The man who bought the inner tubes used them to make galoshes, an item in great demand for the winter months. The young man was sentenced to three years at hard labor in a "remote area of the country," a term which meant Siberia.

During the summer months, teenagers would raid gardens at night looking for produce ready to eat. On our day off, we were baking potatoes on an open fire in the back of our dormitory. Our factory supervisor joined us, and we all stuffed ourselves with baked potatoes. The supervisor wanted to know where the potatoes came from. We told him we had raided a potato field the night before. He suggested we take him along the next time. The man had a wife and two small children, but he was prepared to go out with a bunch of teenagers and take the risk of getting caught. We told him he didn't have to come with us; we promised to share with him any produce we might get in the future. Most people found some way to augment their food rations, and that was our way.

Finally, the news from the front was all positive. Every day, on the radio public address system, a list of liberated cities would be announced. Among them were familiar names in the area of my home in Poland. I followed the news with great interest, and thoughts about my family and their fate dominated my mind. I actually began to think about returning to the area where all my family members lived at the start of the war in June, 1941.

I wanted to contribute to the war effort against the Nazis in some way, so I went to the local military office to volunteer for the army.

The soldier behind the table looked me over and asked, "How old are you?" I answered, "Sixteen."

He laughed and said, "We will send for you when your time comes." I had the feeling it was rare for someone to volunteer for the military.

The fighting now took place on German soil, and there was serious talk about the war ending soon. On May 10, 1945, the war was officially declared over, and the day was declared a national holiday. It was a tremendously joyous occasion.

After the war ended, there was talk about a new policy for the employees. Vacation time might be granted to employees from our factory. My dream was coming true. I requested and finally was granted 30 days vacation. During the war, the news had reported Nazi atrocities in general, but no special mention of the fate of the Jews. From my earlier experience under the Germans in 1939, I knew that Jews were singled out for the harshest treatment. My gut feeling told me my family members probably did not survive, but I was hoping for a miracle. I decided to go to Lakhovici to look for my family.

THE SEARCH FOR MY FAMILY

With authorized vacation and travel documents in order, I bought a train ticket to Lakhovici. In the Fall of 1945, a few months after the war ended, I set out on a trip to search for my family. The trains were packed with military and civilian travelers. Train tickets did not guarantee a seat on the train; they did not even guarantee standing room. There were too many travelers and not enough trains. The boarding process was impossible to control. A conductor did check for tickets on the moving train. I managed to board a train going west, but I had to transfer three times to reach my destination, Lakhovici. The last transfer was a train going to Warsaw, Poland. It was late in the day, dusk was fast approaching, and the train was really packed. I was wedged in the middle of a group of soldiers pushing toward the door. Just as I reached the train, the conductor closed the door. The train started to move; two soldiers jumped on the step of the car and I followed them, holding onto the hand railing with one hand. The two soldiers deliberately would not make room for me; they tried to force me off. The train was speeding up; and I was pleading with them to let me stay on the step. I told them my destination and the reason for the trip. They finally believed me when I mentioned Lakhovici. They were from the same area, going home. At first they thought I was a pickpocket looking for victims on the train.

After several hours riding on the step, the train stopped at a station, the door opened and some people got off the train. All three of us managed to get inside the car. It was a relief to get off the crowded and windy step. I found a clear spot on the floor on which to sit down. Cold and exhausted, I immediately fell asleep. I was awakened by the police for a document check at the pre-1939 Soviet-Polish border. Border police routinely checked documents even though it was no longer an official border. Travel to the former Eastern Polish area was strictly controlled. My travel papers were in order and I was allowed to remain on the train. The train was nearing my destination, and I was getting more anxious. The conductor informed me the next stop was Lakhovici.

The train stopped; I was the only passenger to get off. Things did not look familiar, but the sign said Lakhovici. I asked a peasant for directions. When I reached the outskirts of town, I recognized the blacksmith's old wooden shed. The main street ran from the beginning of the town, through the small town square and out the other end, where the house was in which my family lived. Almost all the houses in town had survived the war without damage. As I

approached the center of town, things looked familiar, except the town looked neglected. The streets appeared narrower, and the houses looked smaller than when I last saw them, at age twelve, five years earlier. I was approaching the houses on the main street where I had left my mother and my brother Shalom living in the room of a farmer's house. It seemed that I had already passed the house. It was all like a dream. Was it possible I didn't remember what the house looked like?

Certain I had passed the house, I turned around, walked back and forth several times, when it occurred to me the house I was looking for had stood where the empty lot was now.

I stood there, staring at the empty lot, when a young woman came out of the house across the street and asked me, "What are you looking for?" In response, I asked her, "What happened to the people who lived in the house that stood on this lot?" I told her my mother and a brother had lived in the house which stood there when the war broke out, in June, 1941. I wanted to talk to the owners of the missing house. The young lady said the house burned down, and she took me to a house across the street. As I entered, I immediately recognized our former landlady, and her grown son. When I told her who I was, she turned white, tears came to her eyes, and she exclaimed, "I thought you were dead! Where did you come from?"

I asked her, "What happened to my mother and brother?" The lady said when the Germans conducted the first round-up of Jews, my family managed to hide. However, they were seized and taken away by the Germans during the second round-up. She said when the war started, my brother Shymon, with two sisters, returned home to my mother. The lady did not remember the names of my sisters; and she did not offer any other details about events from that period.

Her account of what happened to my family was so vague, so brief and so final; we never spoke about my family again. I can only speculate that my brother Shymon, who attended trade school in Grodno, went to the orphanage in Berezhno, picked up sisters Lea and Sima, and joined mother in Lakhovici. It meant that 10 year-old Lea, 11 year-old Sima, 15 year-old Shymon, 16 year-old Shalom, and my mother, who was 39, were murdered by the Germans the summer of 1942 during the second round-up of the Jewish population in Lakhovici.

What had happened to 7 year-old Rachel, who was in an orphanage in Bialystok, and 5 year-old Benjamin, who was in an orphanage in Grodno? These were but a few of very many unanswered questions. These revelations did not shock me. Deep in my heart, I had expected the worst. I was in a daze, and confused about what to do next.

The lady invited me to stay with them, and I accepted her invitation. The peasant family was very poor. Their house with all the belongings burned down. They were now living in one room in a relative's house. But their invitation was sincere. I slept beside them on top of the brick oven, ate with them out of the same family bowl and worked with them in the field. That gave me time to think about my future. The lady told me a few Jews had returned to Lakhovici after the area was liberated. She wanted to take me to Rabinowitz, a man who had survived the war hidden by a peasant. I saw no purpose in meeting the local Jews. I decided to return "home," to the factory in Achtyrka. I was ready to leave for the railroad station, but the lady insisted I first go with her to see Rabinowitz. I finally agreed. She took me to his house, introduced me to him, and left. He started talking to me in Yiddish, but I couldn't understand a word he was saying. I hadn't spoken or heard a single Yiddish word in over five years.

He looked at me and said, "You don't look Jewish, are you circumcised?"

I answered, "I still remember how to sign my name in Yiddish."

I signed Katz in Yiddish, and Rabinowitz accepted it as proof that I was Jewish.

He told me what had happened to the Jews of this town. The Germans shot them in a field a few kilometers outside of Lakhovici. The place was not even marked; it was indistinguishable from surrounding fields in that area. Again, the comments about the fate of the Jews were brief and final. It was common knowledge to everybody. No one wanted to dwell on it. People were looking to the future, trying to salvage and reconstruct their lives.

I was considering visiting the field where members of my family were buried; but the surviving Jews showed no interest. Their response was, "There is nothing to be seen." They had their personal reasons for not going there, and I respected their feelings. The subject was never discussed again.

Each one of the Jewish families was planning to take advantage of a new decree, allowing people from formerly Polish territories to leave for Poland. Rabinowitz suggested that I stay with him, and promised to arrange for the necessary papers for me to go to Poland with him.

They were all clinging to the hope of finding family survivors there. None wanted to stay in Poland. However there was talk of possible emigration from Poland to America and to Palestine.

The potential for a miraculous encounter with a family survivor in Poland and a chance to immigrate to either America or Palestine provided a strong motivation for me to go to Poland. The question was: Could it be done.

Rabinowitz had lost his entire family. Now he had a new family. A wife who survived the war hidden in the woods, and they had a new baby. Some of the other Jews in town had returned from eastern parts of Russia, and others survived in the woods of this area. They all encouraged me to follow them to Poland. I accepted Rabinowitz's offer. I stayed at his house, helped with the chores, and was prepared to wait for the day when we would all leave together. Frequently, I asked Rabinowitz if he had arranged for my papers. The answer was always "no".

I was concerned that my 30-day vacation would run out. Without valid papers it would make me a deserter from the factory. I would become an illegal person in Lakhovici. That convinced me that it was best for me to return to Achtyrka before my travel documents expired. Rabinowitz continued to reassure me that I had no reason to be concerned; he advised me to stay. With three vacation days left, I boarded a train for the return trip to Achtyrka, and my job in the factory, without saying goodbye to Rabinowitz.

THE RETURN TO ACHTYRKA

I arrived in Achtyrka and reported to work exactly on time, without a single day to spare. But, somehow things were not the same. It no longer felt like home. I was now thinking about my future. The loss of my family was no longer speculation. It was fact. My true identity was brought back to the surface, and I was being drawn back to my roots. I thought if any one of my family survived, chances of finding them would be much better if I lived among the survivors. I could not concentrate on my job, and the return to Poland was constantly on my mind. But, how could I possibly leave the factory? I could not get authorization to leave, especially with my assumed identity. I couldn't expose myself to close scrutiny.

I kept in touch with Anna, the only person who knew my thoughts. She was very understanding; she neither encouraged nor discouraged my intention to leave the country. The only way I could leave my job was without permission and travel without documents. It was a risk I had to take.

THE RETURN TO LAKHOVICI

When I stayed with the farmer in Lakhovici, I watched the son struggle with an old file, trying to sharpen a saw. I picked up two files, discarded by the factory to take for the farmer, when I would return to Lakhovici.

Approximately one month after I returned from my vacation, I put a few things in my backpack, including the two files, and took off after dark to the railroad station. I took the first train that came along, and got off a short distance away, to transfer to a train going west. It was late at night. As I was on my way to board the train, a policeman stopped me and started asking questions. I didn't have any papers, so he told me to follow him to the police station. I told him I had oral permission to visit my family in Sumy for three days. He picked up the telephone to check on my story with the factory.

I was certain the call would result in serious trouble for me. Fortunately, it was the middle of the night, so no one answered the phone. He gave up after several tries. He decided to check the contents of my backpack. Among my personal belongings, he found the two old files. He called that stolen government property. I told him the truth. The files had been discarded because they were old and used up. He did not believe me and continued to question my entire story. I insisted I was telling the truth. A train was about to leave, and I pleaded with him to let me catch it, so I could visit my family. He let me go! His sudden change in attitude really surprised me. Did he have a sixteen year-old son like myself, and therefore gave me the benefit of the doubt?.

I jumped on the steps just as the train started to move. I was concerned the policeman would contact the factory in the morning. Therefore, I decided not to continue on this train. I got off in Sumy and went to see Anna. I told her what had happened the previous night, and that it would be best for me to stay out of sight for a few days. Anna invited me to stay with her. I could talk with her openly now. In my letters, I had to keep in mind that the postal censors might read the mail; and that could lead to trouble for both of us.

Anna's mother still lived with her, but her aunt with the two children had moved out. I slept in the empty room, but Anna's mother was probably restless with me in the house.

I told Anna about my four weeks in Lakhovici, and about the fate of my family. I thought if any other members of my family survived, they would probably return to Poland to search for possible survivors. I also told her that Poland would be a stopping-off point, on the way to Palestine or America. To my surprise, she thought I would have a better future in America. It was an unusually candid comment, since the Soviet Union and America were ideological adversaries, and Anna was a very loyal citizen. My leaving the factory without permission would have been considered a criminal act. Illegal departure from the country would have been considered treason. I was careful not to make Anna an accessory to my "crimes" any more than necessary. These discussions were strictly between Anna and me.

I was beginning to get restless after three days in Sumy. I wanted to resume my journey. Anna thought I should have some piece of paper to make my trip appear legal. She got me a letter from a friend of hers, stating that I worked in that office, and I was authorized to make the trip. We both understood that the letter would not pass close scrutiny. If discovered it would result in serious problems for Anna and her friend. The law enforcement system was swift. The legal process was usually short and the sentence was long. I hid the letter in one of my shoes and resumed my journey, without a train ticket and without documents. It was my second trip to the Western Region of the Soviet Union in two months. But this time I had to be extremely alert at all times, for I was traveling illegally.

I was traveling on top of a rail car one night; it was safe, but very cold. I climbed down from the roof to look for shelter from the wind. I managed to get inside a car where it felt nice and warm. I stayed close to the door, convenient for a fast exit, if necessary. Suddenly, I was facing a woman conductor, who came in the door to check tickets. I told her that I did not have a ticket, but I had to come in to warm up. Then I pleaded with her to please let me stay. She told me I must leave the car, or she would have to turn me over to the police at the next station. I begged her not to turn me in, and at the same moment, slipped her a thirty-ruble bill. She accepted the bill and said, "Follow me." She took me to a small empty compartment, and said, "You can stay here." I told her I was going to Lakhovici, and to please wake me before we reached the old border. She assured me I was safe there. I was planning to hide before the document check. I was not completely sure she could be trusted, but I was very tired and very sleepy, so I lay down on the bench and fell asleep.

The next thing I heard was the opening of the door. The lady conductor came in. It was bright daylight.

I asked her, "When will we be crossing the old border?" She said, "We already crossed it."

What a relief that was! I was convinced she did it because she was compassionate. The money I gave her did not amount to much; it would only buy a snack on the black market.

This was now familiar territory, and we were getting close to my destination. The train stopped. I got off and headed for town. Since I did not say anything to Rabinowitz when I left to return to Achtyrka, it was awkward to stay with him. I decided to go to the farmer's house. They were very surprised to see me. I explained why I had returned. I stayed with them, and worked in the fields until I left Lakhovici. The son really appreciated the two old files I had brought from the factory.

The good news was that Rabinowitz was still waiting for authorization papers to leave for Poland. I went to see him to ask him if he could arrange for me to go along with his family. He was upset because I hadn't said anything to him when I left for Achtyrka. His answer was noncommittal. I went to see the other Jews in town. they were all very sympathetic to my predicament, but couldn't help me.

They had discussed my situation earlier, and they all told me that the easiest way would be for Rabinowitz to add me to his family's papers as his wife's brother. His wife, Fruma, had a brother about my age, already in Poland, and it would be simple for me to take his place. Rabinowitz finally promised he would add me to his papers as Fruma's brother.

I met a Jewish lady a few days later, who asked if Rabinowitz had added me to his papers. When I told her he had not, this outspoken lady was visibly annoyed, and concerned. She said she would talk to Rabinowitz, because the departure date for the special train for Poland was getting near. The next day Rabinowitz's niece, Rachel, took me to the emigration office in Baranovici, and had me added to the papers as Fruma's brother. I was amazed how easy that went. No questions were asked, and it took only a few minutes to accomplish a very important deed. Finally, I felt my chances of reaching Poland were excellent.

I was still holding onto the document, "Authorization to Travel," given to me by Anna. Now I was so optimistic I wouldn't need it, that I burned it.

Two days before we left Lakhovici, I was walking down the street past the police station, when a uniformed man called me inside. He asked for my identification papers. He did not believe my story that I was a resident of Lakhovici. He could tell from my factory-issue clothes that I came from the eastern part of the Soviet Union. Somehow, he suspected or guessed I had run away from a factory. I told him I lived with the Rabinowitz family. He decided to hold me for further questioning, by the officer in charge, who was expected soon. I was trying to get word to Rabinowitz of my detention, but there was no opportunity to do so.

The movement of people was strictly controlled throughout the Soviet Union. Every move required authorization and documentation by the government. A stranger in this small town, even a seventeen year-old like myself, was vulnerable to police scrutiny and harassment.

I suspected the policeman was looking for a bribe for my freedom, probably from Ravinowitz. I had nothing to offer him. I was concerned this might turn into a serious problem. While I was sitting in the office, a uniformed police woman reported for duty. The officer who called me in went to lunch. It occurred to me the woman officer did not know why I was there. I could have been waiting for a number of reasons. The room where I sat was for the public, not for detention. I was waiting for her to be distracted.

As a peasant came in with some complaint, I got up, casually walked to the door, opened it, walked out, slowly closed the door, and dashed across the street into an empty dilapidated building. I looked back; nobody was following me. I made my way to Rabinowitz's house, about a block from the police station. Rabinowitz was not at home, I told his wife, Fruma what had happened. She was concerned that if the police found me in their house, they could get into trouble. Suddenly, out the window, I recognized a civilian man from the police station coming to the house. I blurted out, "Don't tell him anything; he is from the police." I ran into the bedroom and hid under the bed. The man entered the house, asked for Rabinowitz, looked around the house, walked into the bedroom, and walked out. He did not state the reason for his visit. I felt somewhat safer now, since the police probably believed I had gone elsewhere.

When Rabinowitz returned home, Fruma told him what had happened. I convinced them the house was the safest place for me to be; and we agreed I would not leave the house.

Rabinowitz finally had good news. he said that tomorrow the family would move to Baranovici and wait there for the special train to Poland. They started packing their belongings and loading them onto a horse-drawn wagon for the overnight trip to Baranovici. Since the police knew about the planned departure, I decided to leave town earlier and wait for Rabinowitz on the outskirts of town.

Rabinowitz gave me an old pair of shoes with new soles the day we departed Lakhovici. He insisted I wear them. The peasant lady with whom I stayed did not have a decent pair of shoes, so I gave her mine. He was intensely concerned about the safety of the shoes. On the train to Poland, I used them as my pillow at night. He, and others, had to convert their life's posessions into something small that could be hidden and transported easily. It was obvious that something valuable was hidden in my shoes.

It was a pitch black night. I left Rabinowitz's house, on my way out of town, when I heard a man's voice yelling in Russian, "Who is there?"

Without slowing down and trying to control my fear, I answered, "A man going to the railroad station." It was a Russian soldier guarding a building occupied by the military. It was too dark for him to see me across the street. I was ready to run if he had ordered me to stop, but luckily he didn't. I continued on my way. I stopped outside town and waited for Rabinowitz with his horse and wagon. I was still cautious and concerned that the police might still be looking for me. Rabinowitz had sent his wife and baby to Baranovici earlier in the day.

Early in the morning we arrived at our destination: the apartment of Nellie and Selig Karabinik. The apartment consisted of two rooms with little furniture. The Karabniks had a smaller room for themselves. The larger room had a small wood-burning stove for heating and cooking, and a small table with two chairs. Most of the floor was covered with straw for about ten other people and us to sleep on. Everybody, including the Karabiniks, was waiting for the special train to Poland.

The Karabiniks shared their home and whatever food they had with the entire group. We were like one big family.

Selig had been in the Russian army during the Russian-Finnish war in 1940; he was wounded and captured by the Finns. He survived as a prisoner of war in Finland. He returned to his native Lakhovici after the war to discover his wife, three children, and the rest of his family had been killed by the Germans.

Nellie had lost her husband and a two year-old son; she too was alone. Nellie spent the war years in several concentration camps under the most inhuman conditions, and was very lucky to have survived. She was liberated by the American army in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, weighing ninety pounds and barely alive. Most inmates of Bergen-Belsen had died of hunger and disease. At the end of the war, Nellie and Selig were looking for family survivors, and found each other. Selig had only partial use of his right arm due to his war wounds. Nellie was in poor health from years in the concentration camps.

Everybody in that house had lost a family in the Holocaust, but nobody talked about it. The focus was on the future. The first step was to reach Poland, and then continue the search for a new home, away from Europe. After waiting for about one week in Baranovici, the departure date for the special train, was announced. The next day, we all reported to the railroad station. Our special train consisting of freight cars, was ready for us. The Rabinowitzes, The Karabiniks, some other survivors, and I were in the same freight car sleeping on the floor and sharing food. It was a very exciting and hopeful time. The immediate concern was the crossing of the border from the Soviet Union into Poland.

Stories had been circulating about the thorough searches by the Russian border police, and about the confiscation of valuables. The train stopped at the border for inspection. Two Russian military officers climbed into our car, checked all our documents, casually looked over the personal belongings, asked if anyone had gold hidden in the packages, and then departed. Everyone was greatly relieved; the inspection had been much less thorough than we had anticipated. I was especially relieved to have passed the document inspection, traveling as Panicz, my temporary identity as Fruma's brother.

Everybody in our rail car communicated in Yiddish. With me, they had to communicate in Russian, the only language I spoke and understood at the time.

After hearing nothing but Yiddish for several weeks, I began to understand the language, but I still answered in Russian.

Nellie, in her blunt way, said to me, "What kind of a Jew are you? Why don't you speak Yiddish? People won't believe you are Jewish!"

After I was exposed to Yiddish for a couple of months, I started to speak the "Litvish" dialect of the Baranovici region. At home in Pultusk, we spoke the "Polish" dialect. Later, my early childhood Polish dialect came back to me, and I could easily switch from one dialect to another.

As we crossed the border into Poland, the country actually looked different. The area was cleaner, and the houses seemed to be in better condition. It looked more prosperous. Our train waited in stations a lot, to allow scheduled trains to pass. After three days, our train reached the final destination: The city of Lodz. I had no idea what I was going to do in Lodz, or where my next home would be. The train stopped and I got off with my little sack of personal belongings. I thought I was finally safe from being detained by the Russians. I could be myself again!

IN LODZ

I noticed that people were at the station to greet the new arrivals from our train. A young man approached me, asked me if I was alone; and if I had a place to stay. He invited me to come with him to a place for single young people. I didn't know anything about the organization, and didn't ask any questions. I could not have asked for a better reception. I accepted the invitation with alacrity and great relief. I was taken to a large hall filled with cots, given clean bedding and assigned one of the empty cots. The women had a much smaller room, there being fewer of them. I was pleasantly surprised and pleased to find many single people like myself, only somewhat older. We received three simple, but adequate meals a day. It was a communal life style, every person was treated the same. It was like one big family. The arrangement and conditions were much better than I had expected, and certainly a big improvement from my life of the past several years. It was the Kibbutz Hashomer Hatzair.

The purpose of the Kibbutz was to prepare for the eventual journey to a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Meetings were held to educate the members in subjects related to Jewish history, and to discuss the future direction of the group. In the evening, there was organized singing of Hebrew songs, dancing the Hora, and occasional lessons in the Hebrew language. For the first time since I was separated from my family, I felt I belonged to a "family."

The families from our special train were given private temporary housing. Lodz appeared to be the assembly point for Jewish survivors in Poland. A few survived in hiding, some were members of the partisans who fought Germans in the forests of western Russia, and some had returned from eastern Russia. Lodz was a stop-off point, on the long journey in search for a more permanent destination.

Rabinowitz came to see me. He gave me a substitute pair of shoes, and took the old ones. He was accompanied by Sam Panicz, Fruma's brother (already in Lodz), whose identity I had assumed for the departure from Russia. After two different names in two years, I returned to my real name. Sam later joined my Kibbutz, so that his family would be eligible for travel with the Kibbutz to the American Zone in West Germany. The borders were closed, so we could not legally leave Poland.

Organizations like our Kibbutz were better prepared; they had the experience and necessary connections for illegal travel across the borders.

The City of Lodz was a new world for me, much different from the small Polish town of my early childhood, Pultusk. I explored the City whenever I had the chance. I was still dressed in the same factory-issued clothing from Russia. As I was walking down the street, a Russian military policeman stopped me and asked me what I as doing in Lodz. My heart sank; I started to explain about my Polish background, but he wouldn't even listen to me. He accused me of running away from the Soviet Union, and ordered me to come with him. On the way to the police station, he accused me of being against communism, against collective farms; and he insisted I was Russian. It was potential trouble, because I had no document to prove my true identity.

Terrible thoughts ran through my mind. I had assumed I would be safe in Poland, and I would be under the jurisdiction of the Polish government. Could they send me back to the Soviet Union and possibly to prison? The policeman delivered me to the military police station. There a Russian officer questioned me about where I had escaped from; and was I truly Russian? He did not believe the story of my true identity; he persisted with his line of questioning. I persisted with the story of my real Polish background. I was afraid if they found out I had left my factory job without permission, they would return me to Russia.

Finally, he called for someone from the next room. A man dressed in the uniform of a Polish army officer came and took over the questioning. He tried to communicate with me in Polish, but I explained that I had forgottten Polish after five years in the Soviet Union. He then switched to Russian. I told him the true story of my life, that I was searching for possible family survivors, and that I was all alone. He appeared to believe me. He whispered something to the Russian officer, and surprisingly, said I was free to leave. I went straight home to my Kibbutz, found some other clothes, and got rid of my factory-issued, uniform-like clothing. I found out that in Poland, my freedom was not yet complete.

The problem of the Jewish refugees, survivors of the Holocaust, was being discussed by the international community. The Jewish leaders everywhere were demanding a Jewish State in Palestine, as a homeland for the refugees.

The United Nations had appointed a commission to study the question, and to get first-hand information from the refugees scattered in Europe. The commission was coming to Lodz, the Jewish refugee center in Poland,on a fact-finding mission. A demonstration had been planned to influence the commission when it arrived in Lodz. Jews from throughout Poland were assembling for the first and very important post-war event. Every member of our Kibbutz, and probably every Jew in Lodz, participated in the demonstration. Our group never got close to the United Nations commission. The demonstration left lasting memories with me. We all marched in the middle of the street, very orderly. The sidewalks on both sides were lined with Polish people, our compatriots, observing the demonstration. As we moved along the street, I heard the same comment, over and over, "Where do they all come from?" They seemed disappointed to see that so many Jews had survived and dared demonstrate in "their country." Polish Jews were treated like unwanted foreigners.

There was talk that our Kibbutz would soon leave Lodz. I wanted to visit my home town, Pultusk, to see if by any chance, a member of my family survived. It would make sense for a survivor to go to his home town to find out if anybody else was there looking for other survivors. I mentioned my intentions to people at the Kibbutz. Their immediate and firm reply was, "Don't be a fool, they will kill you!" The smaller towns were not safe for Jews, even after liberation from the Germans. Only a few weeks earlier, many Jews who returned to their home town of Kielce were massacred by the local Polish people. The few surviving Jews in town, after the pogrom, left for Lodz. My home town was only about one hundred kilometers away, but it seemed a very distant and hostile place.

One evening, as usual, we were sitting on our cots, talking about the anticipated departure from Lodz, when a shot rang out. Our first thought was that the Poles were attacking our building. As it turned out, a Kibbutz member, a former officer in the Polish Army, was handling a pistol in an adjoining room, and the firing was accidental. The bullet went through a wooden door and left a hole in the shirt sleeve of a man sitting next to me. There were a few tense minutes, but fortunately no one was hurt.

IN WALBRZYCH

The Kibbutz was looking for a better home. The entire Kibbutz was transplanted to the town of Walbrzych, former German territory that was ceded to Poland at the end of the war. There, the Kibbutz opened up a bakery for its own needs, and bread for sale to the general public. It also opened a barber shop for the public, to make use of a highly skilled barber among the members. The Kibbutz tried to earn some money to provide for the many needs of its members. I was assigned to help in the barber shop, to sweep the floor, apply soap to the customers' faces prior to shaving, etc. After a few days in the barber shop, I asked for reassignment to the bakery. There, I carried sacks of flour from the truck into the bakery and helped wherever I was needed. Each member of the Kibbutz had a task to do.

We had a bicycle to be used for transportation by the members. I had never had the opportunity to learn to ride a bicycle. At age 17, I was determined to learn. Adjacent to the Kibbutz, was a small street with a grade, running down into a busy street. I would walk the bicycle up the grade, get on, try to balance myself going down the hill, and jump off before reaching the busy street. I fell a few times and sustained minor scrapes and bruises. But after about a week, I managed to stay on the bike and control it.

Some refugees managed to leave Poland during the chaotic weeks immediately after the war ended. Then Poland closed the borders and would not allow anybody to leave the country. The primary reason the Kibbutz moved to Walbrzych was to be closer to the border with Czechoslovakia. We had to be prepared to seize the opportunity to move covertly ahead on short notice. The plan was to reach the American Zone of West Germany. We made several wrong starts. It was especially difficult for a large group to cross the border.

Sam Panicz, whose identity I assumed when I left the Soviet Union, had two sisters. Sister Fruma was Rabinowitz's wife; and sister Luba was married to Shuman. Membership in our Kibbutz was limited to single people. However, members were entitled to take relatives along on the journey from Poland to West Germany. I claimed the Shumans as my relatives. It gave me the opportunity to return the favor the Panicz family did for me. Only physically fit people were included in our group. The Shumans, with baby Richard, were traveling with me as my relatives.

THE DEPARTURE FROM POLAND

Finally, we received word that we were leaving Poland. We boarded a truck, and were driven to a small village on the border. There we were greeted by professional guides. They knew the local language. Their job was to make the illegal crossing of the border as smooth as possible. Our official cover in the village was that we were Greek, on the way home from labor camps in Germany. The entire group was led through the village in daylight, on the way to a secluded house on the border. We were told to walk in silence, because the villagers could tell from our language who we really were. A lady started coughing and asked her daughter, in Yiddish, for a sip of water. A village boy attached himself to our leaders and followed us through the village. He heard the lady ask for water and exclaimed, "They are not Greek; they are Jews!." The guide had a real challenge to convince the boy we were really Greek.

When we arrived at the secluded house at the border, it was almost dark. We were told to wait while the guides arranged with the guards for the border crossing. The wait seemed endless. People were beginning to be concerned that something might go wrong. Finally, the guide returned with another man, and lighted a candle in the dark house packed with very anxious people. The guide addressed the group. He said a problem had developed. The border guards threatened to turn everybody over to the authorities. They would allow us to cross the border only if we gave them all our jewelry. People took off rings and watches and put them in a small sack held by the guide. The guide and the other man left. We were all hoping we would be allowed to cross the border without any further problems. The alternative would be to turn back, or even go to prison. The guide soon returned alone, and announced it was all clear. He moved out on a trail and we all followed him in single file, in the dark and in complete silence.

The hike was long and over rolling hills. I helped the Shumans carry the baby. At one point, when the baby started to cry, he was quickly silenced with a rag over his mouth. It was a very dark night; we could hardly see the person in front of us. Dawn broke, and we could see the rolling hills covered with wet green grass, scattered clumps of trees and patches of fog in the valleys. We were climbing another of the many hills, when the guide told us we were in Czechoslovakia. When we reached the top of the hill, we could see in the

distant valley the most beautiful sight: a Czechoslovak village! It was our destination.

In the village, a young man from Palestine took charge, and loaded us into a covered truck for the trip to the City of Bratislava. In Bratislava, the truck drove through an arch and into a building courtyard. The gate was immediately closed behind us. Our new leaders told us we had permission only to pass through Czechoslovakia on the way to Vienna. Therefore, we would not be allowed to leave the courtyard for any reason. They fed us, and we waited for the next leg of our journey. We again boarded a covered truck, drove to the railroad station, and boarded a passenger train for Vienna. After a very short ride, we reached Vienna. We were met at the station, put into taxis, and taken to a large building behind an ornate iron fence, "The Rothschild House." Everything seemed well organized. Each person was processed and assigned to a final destination in West Germany. Our Kibbutz was assigned to a Displaced Persons (DP) camp in Bad Reichenhall, Bavaria.

After one night in Vienna, we went to Bad Reichenhall. It was a former military camp on the outskirts of a resort town, consisting of several three-story buildings, a large auditorium, and several wooden barracks. The Kibbutz occupied an entire floor in one of the large buildings. This was one of a series of Jewish refugee camps in West Germany. Here everybody waited for the opportunity to emigrate to some country outside of Europe. There was sporadic, illegal emigration to Palestine by various difficult and risky means. An example was the famous ship "Exodus," which was stopped by the British at the shores of Palestine, and the occupants taken to a detention camp on the island of Cyprus. The most popular destination was The United States of America, followed by Canada.

Opportunities to immigrate were very few. Countries had quotas and various requirements for the admittance of refugees. The United States had a different quota for every country. The largest number of Jewish refugees came from Poland. The US-Polish quota could accommodate only a small number of the refugees desiring to go to the U.S. The refugees were waiting and hoping for a change in the immigration laws to allow additional refugees into the country.

To qualify for immigration into the U.S., one needed documented assurance of financial support, a place to live, assurance of employment, and proof the immigrant would not become a burden to the government. Those refugees who had relatives in the United States obviously had a much better chance to be approved for immigration. The summons to the consul for a hearing was the most important sign of progress, but it also represented a serious potential obstacle. There was great anxiety about the consular review of the applicant's health record, political past, and fears of some kind of mental test.

THE DISPLACED PERSONS CAMP

The DP camp became a semi-permanent home for the refugees in West Germany. Life in the camp was a significant improvement over life before the camp. There was the feeling of relative security under the protection of the American Occupation Forces. The defeated Germans showed no overt hostility toward the refugees. However, their resentment surfaced frequently. The United Nations Organization, United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administrttion (UNRRA), provided food rations for every documented refugee. The American Jewish Organization (JOINT), also provided some assistance, especially in the area of help with immigration.

My life as a member of a kibbutz was considerably different from that of the general population in the camp. Kibbutz life was communal. All food rations went to the Kibbutz, based on the number of documented members. We received our meals in the communal dining room. Each member had an assigned task to perform for the benefit of the entire kibbutz. Kibbutz life was structured; it provided a sense of security, a value absent in my life during the last two years. In some ways, it was like a family.

I developed some close and lasting friendships in the Kibbutz. Lazar is one of those friends. He and I are the same age, and we enjoyed the same outdoor activities. His older brother, Paul, lived outside the Kibbutz, in the same camp, with two pre-teen sisters. The four of them were separated form their parents during the War, and managed to escape German-occupied apoland. They spent the war years in the eastern part of Russia under very severe conditions. Lazar and I were roommates in a technical school, which is described later.

Our paths parted after school, but we remain in touch to this day. Lazar now lives in Canada.

Gedalia is another close friend. He and I were also the same age and shared many of the same interests. He too is an only survivor from his entire family.

Gedalia left for Palestine with a group of young men from the Kibbutz in 1947, before emergence of the State of Israel. He was on board the famous ship "Exodus," which was stopped by the British at the shores of Palestine. They forced the ship to go to the island of Cyprus, where all the passengers were interned in a camp behind barbed wire.

Eventually Gedalia reached Israel in 1948 and participated in the War of Independence.

Gedalia married a girl in the Kibbutz who survived the War in Poland, hidden by the Catholic Church. We are still in contact.

The most important change in my life was the return to my real identity. The worry-free and relaxed atmosphere allowed me to start thinking about my future.

It became clear to me that I favored a more independent lifestyle, rather than the communal, regimented life in the kibbutz. I felt that the time in DP camp should be used in a more productive way, to learn some skills, or to further my education. I had no specific plans of my own, nor did I know what opportunities might be available. Individual plans could not be pursued in the kibbutz. Therefore, I moved out of the kibbutz to another building, in a room with three other people, in the same camp.

I often wondered whether there had been any acquaintances of mine from Pultusk who survived the War. One day I read an article in a newspaper published by a refugee organization, written by a Mr. Stern from Pultusk. I wrote to him in another DP camp, to find out if he was one of my teachers from the third grade. I was thrilled when he replied he was. Not only was he the first survivor I encountered from Pultusk, but he was someone I actually knew. He represented a thread to the period in my life when things were normal.

The United States announced a special immigration program for orphans under the age of 18. They were given higher priority, outside the regular quota. I applied to immigrate to the US under the special program for orphans. That gave me a little more hope, but there was no assurance that emigration would be approved.

Life on my own required some money for personal needs. No jobs were available for refugees. To earn some money people would deal in the black market. They would sell certain items from their own food rations, or they would buy merchandise some place, and resell it at a profit in some other place. Dealing in the black market was illegal. If caught, it would result in conviction.

A criminal record would disqualify a person from immigration into the United States. That would be the worst punishment of all.

In the Bad Reichenhall DP camp, I recognized Meyer, the man who had the little grocery store in our building in Pultusk. My mother would send me to buy something in his store almost every day. When I told him who I was, he asked,"You are the son of Katz, the writer?" (I had never heard anybody refer to my father as a writer before) Meyer, our grocer, was the only person I actually met after the war whom I knew before the War. He showed me a picture of my father. It was his wife's group graduation picture from the Pultusk ORT school. There was my father, the school principal, sitting in the middle of the front row. I borrowed the picture, and had my father's picture enlarged into a wallet-sized portrait. It is barely recognizable, and it is the only picture I have of someone in my family.

Meyer asked me one day to go with him on a trip to a village to buy some things for the upcoming Jewish holidays, and he would pay me for my help. It was a short train ride from Bad Reichenhall. His contacts were refugee village residents, who traded with the local farmers, and sold things to others, like Meyer. He bought white flour for baking and eight live chickens. These were special things for the holidays to be resold to camp residents. It was about a two kilometer walk from the village to the railroad station. Meyer carried the flour and I carried the eight live chickens in two cardboard boxes, balanced over my shoulders. To be less conspicuous, I walked about a block behind him.

As I walked past the village police station, a policeman heard the noisy chickens, and called me inside. He wanted to know where I got the chickens. I told him a farmer, of vague description, sold them to me at the village intersection. The chickens remained at the police station. He told me to get on the back of his motorcycle, and took me to a farmer. He asked the farmer whether he knew me, and whether he had sold chickens. The farmer did not. The policeman took me to three other farmers, asked them the same questions, and got the same answers. We finally returned to the police station without the identity of the seller of the chickens. The policeman confiscated the chickens and released me. I made it to the station, barely in time to catch the train. Meyer was nervously pacing the platform, wondering if I had implicated him. When I assured him he was safe, he picked up the sack of flour, and we both returned to Bad Reichenhall.

Since the cost of the chickens was a loss to Meyer, he did not pay me for my unproductive help. I decided not to repeat this type of risk-taking for anybody else. I learned it was fairly easy to earn some money, but there was always some risk involved. I made the trip to the same village twice on my own and purchased whatever farm products refugees in the village had to offer at the time, and resold them in the camp. By coincidence, two years later, I met these same refugees, in Petaluma, California. They had become chicken ranchers in Petaluma.

AN AGONIZING DECISION

The Zionist movement in the DP camps was well organized and very active. Every major political party in existence in Palestine was represented in the camps, and most of them had formed kibbutzim to attract the young men and women. There was great interest in the United Nation's deliberations about the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine. Prominent political leaders would tour the camps to address the residents on the issue. The historic day arrived in May, 1948, when the creation of the State of Israel was announced. The news was greeted with great joy. There was dancing and singing in the camp square. However, the celebration was dampened by the disturbing news that the Arab countries had attacked the new State. The celebration gave way to emotion-charged rallies, and a call for immigration, to help the new State in its struggle for survival. Young men were responding to the call and signing up to go to Israel. I was among them. It had been many months since I had registered for immigration to America, and there had been no response. Approval of my papers was by no means assured. Therefore, I decided to go to Israel. We were immediately sent to a special transition camp to wait until all the logistics for the trip were arranged. There was a group of us from Bad Reichenhall, among them a friend of mine, Mendel.

Mendel and I were in the Kibbutz together for over two years. We became close friends. During the days of waiting, we received training in self-defense, physical training, and various military training with mock rifles. Weapons were not allowed in the camp because we were on foreign soil.

We were waiting for the date of our departure to Israel, when a message from Bad Reichenhall reached me. My papers for immigration to America had been approved. I was faced with an agonizing decision: to choose between Israel and America. My friends, who did not have that choice, said they would go to America if they had the opportunity. That made the decision easier. At dawn, the next day, to avoid making it obvious that my departure was permanent, I left my meager personal belongings behind, sneaked out of the camp, and returned to the DP camp in Bad Reichenhall. I felt like a deserter, and it was on my conscience for many years. The group of men I left behind departed for Israel two days later. Four years later, on my first trip to Israel, I was warmly welcomed by many of my old friends from the Kibbutz, including Mendel.

THE RETURN TO BAD REICHENHALL

The approval of the papers by the American Consul was the most important step on the journey to America, followed by the anxious wait for the date of departure. The orphans received higher priority, but, like all applicants, we needed official documents to show that we had a place to stay, and a guarantee of a job as proof that we would not become a burden to the government. Sam Panicz, whose relatives in Oakland helped him to emigrate one year earlier, arranged for my required documents. But the departure date was still unknown and unpredictable.

To earn some money during this period, I would occasionally travel by train to another town, buy live fish, pack them in many layers of paper to keep the smell in, put them in two suitcases, and bring them to Bad Reichenhall. The fish would arrive in time to be sold for the Friday Shabbat dinner.

Oranges were almost impossible to get. When I heard of a source, I went there and bought a suitcase full of oranges. I had to change trains in Munich for the return trip to Bad Reichenhall. I was carrying the heavy suitcase full of oranges, when a policeman stopped me and told me to follow him to the police station. They made me open the suitcase. I could sense their personal interest in the oranges, a rare commodity for the German population, as well as for refugees. They immediately told me I could go to jail for this illegal activity. I told them the oranges were for children in the DP camp, and asked them to let me continue the trip to Bad Reichenhall. After a brief conference among themselves, the officer in charge suggested a compromise: He said that if I agreed to turn over the oranges to the Red Cross for sick children in hospitals, they would release me. However, the suitcase with the oranges remained at the police station, and I was happy to walk away from it. The three police officers in the police station were most likely the only beneficiaries of those oranges.

Another time, my friend Lazar and I traveled to another DP camp; and each of us bought a suitcase full of chocolate bars. American cigarettes were the most sought-after product, and chocolate bars were not far behind in demand. Both products would be used in exchange for other products, and were better than local currency. On our return trip, police boarded the train for a periodic surprise raid to search for black market activities. They would point to a piece of luggage and call for the owner to open it.

The police pointed to Lazar's luggage and he opened the suitcase. The police took Lazar with his suitcase off the train. When they pointed to my suitcase, also full of chocolates, I did not come forward, so they confiscated the suitcase, and I remained on the train. When I returned to Bad Reichenhall, I told Lazar's brother Paul what had happened. Paul and I returned to the town where Lazar was arrested. The American Occupation Forces with the German police had joint jurisdiction over refugees in the law enforcement areas. Paul and I attended the trial. Lazar was sentenced to five days in jail, the exact time he had been under arrest. Lazar was released and we all returned to the camp in Bad Reichenhall. It served as a reminder that black market activities were risky, and it was best to stay away from them.

TECHNICAL SCHOOL

There was still no word from the American Consul about my emigration date. I felt I should be doing something more productive with my time. As soon as I heard that an ORT vocational school would open up, I immediately signed up for it. A few days later, Lazar, a few other friends from Bad Reichenhall and I moved to Rosenheim to attend the ORT school. Lazar and I were given a room all to ourselves. We were among the first students from various DP camps in the area. My father had been the principal of the Pultusk ORT school, and now I was a student in one. The only admission requirement was a desire to learn some skills. There was no entrance examination, no prerequisites of any kind and it was all free, including room and board. The student population was all male. The ages ranged from late teens to early twenties, with various educational backgrounds, but all highly motivated. Like most DP camps, the school was located in a former army camp. The classroom consisted of an ordinary room with tables and chairs and a blackboard. There was no special equipment. The teachers were all German, with an engineering or teaching background. The school director was a German Jew.

All the instructions were in German; the subject matter was provided by each teacher, without any text books. The students learned by listening to the lectures and by taking notes. The students' native languages were either Polish or Russian with some proficiency in Yiddish, and whatever German each individual managed to pick up from contacts with the local population. We learned the vocational subject and the German language at the same time. I enrolled in the Electrical Technology program. Lazar enrolled in a cabinet-maker program, and later became a successful cabinet-maker in Canada. It provided me with an excellent introduction and the inspiration to study the subject in the future.

The multi-language classroom atmosphere provided frequent humorous moments. When the teacher of Electrical Theory drew a sine-wave on the blackboard, and mentioned the word "curve," the class roared with laughter. The German word for "curve" means whore in Polish. Later, whenever the teacher had to use the word "curve," he would pause, look at the students with a smile on his face, and say the word.

NEWS FROM THE AMERICAN CONSUL

Soon after the final examination at the end of the semester in the ORT school, I received notice from the American Consul to report to Prien, a transition point for orphans on the way to America. Prien served as an assembly point for the Jewish orphans from various DP camps. After a brief stay in a large house in the town of Prien on Lake Chiem See, we were transferred to Bad Aibling. It was a special camp for orphans of various nationalities, all waiting for the departure date to America or Canada. The camp consisted of several buildings, each nationality having a separate building. Jewish kids were a separate group, Polish kids another group, kids from Baltic states represented a group.

The leaders of the Jewish community in West Germany decided that the young men and women in Bad Aibling had needs like any other Jewish community, and they assigned a Rabbi to live and work with us. He served as a catalyst to turn us into a community. We organized traditional cultural events around the Jewish holidays, and the Rabbi organized religious services.

Here, I met Zelda, a pretty young lady with wavy dark hair. It developed into a serious relationship. Like all the young people in this camp, Zelda was an orphan, though she did have two older sisters living in one of the DP camps. The sisters decided to go to Israel, so Zelda left Bad Aibling to join them, and they went to Israel together. We started to correspond after she reached Israel, and the correspondence continued after I arrived in America. When I was stationed in Germany with the American Army in 1952, I made my first trip to Israel and visited Zelda. It was a very happy reunion. On the third day, things turned serious. Zelda had marriage in mind, but I always wanted to get an education, to prepare for a decent job before making a life-long commitment. I gave her some lame and awkward excuse; it resulted in a friendly but sad parting.

My immigration papers were in the advanced stages. The documents assuring me of a job and a place to live in Oakland, sent to me by Sam Panicz, were accepted by the American Consul. All my papers were in order. The only things I needed were the final papers from the U.S. Consul and the departure date. The waiting was long; but finally, I was notified to report to Wartenberg.

CAMP WARTENBERG

Wartenberg was a transition camp, run by the YMCA, for boys waiting to immigrate to America or Canada. The camp population consisted of about fifty boys between the ages of 15 to 19, of various nationalities, with a staff from the Baltic States. The facility, a three-story building had been a private convalescent hospital, located outside the village in a secluded area near the woods, The staff organized voluntary educational programs and various sports activities for those who were interested.

The place had a small library with various books in German, and some in English. I found an Algebra book in English and started to work problems where language was not involved. A staff member, an architect from Latvia, helped me with Algebra, and got me started doing architectural drafting. I enjoyed learning something new. he was enthusiastic about coaching me, and I spent at least part of the time in Wartenberg constructively.

An official from UNRRA in a Canadian military uniform, would visit the camp periodically. He pulled up to the entrance of the building in his jeep, turned off the engine and went inside. Any type of a car was a novelty to us; we rarely had a chance to examine one close up. After examining it there, I tried sitting in the driver's seat, turned the ignition key, managed to shift into gear, and the car started to move. I was so excited about my accomplishment that I couldn't resist the temptation, and continued driving in the same gear, around the perimeter road. As I turned the last bend in the road, I noticed the owner of the jeep standing at the building entrance and looking in my direction. I managed to stop the jeep and take it out of gear, right in front of him. The man was furious. He yelled at me in English and mixed a few words in German to make sure I understood that he was very angry. Since I knew nothing about the car, this represented a great feat for me. Fortunately, my punishment was limited to scolding.

Sometimes, on a Saturday evening, we would go to the village dance for traditional ballroom dancing. Couples, as well as young single men and women, would attend these dances. The man would always ask the woman to dance, and the woman would always accept. It would be a big insult to the man to be rejected by the woman. Only once during the evening would the band leader announce a traditional "woman's choice," when a woman would ask a man to dance. A man from

our group returned to our table very upset. When he asked a woman to dance, she got up, but a local man pulled her down to her chair and would not let her dance with our friend.

There was always tension under the surface between the local men and ourselves. The local men didn't want their women to dance with foreigners. The incident was a clear insult, and it showed open resentment of our presence in the dance hall. After the dance, we followed that man home and beat him up. About half an hour after we returned home, around midnight, the place was surrounded by the villagers. They threatened to attack the home. The manager of our home, a German-speaking Latvian, skillfully negotiated with the enraged local men. After lengthy negotiations, and a promise to find and punish the perpetrators of the beating, did the mob disperse. They warned that if they caught us in the village, they would beat us up. We took the threat seriously. Two weeks later, one of our boys decided to go to the village, and he did get a beating. That ended the incident. However we never went to village dances again.

Wartenberg was the most pleasant of all the camps I lived in. For the first time since the War started, I had the opportunity to do the things young people my age did. I participated in volleyball, basketball, hockey (on a concrete surface), discus throwing, track, etc.

Every once in a while, some lucky guys would depart Wartenberg for America or Canada, their final destination. I corresponded with Sam Panicz and kept him informed about my emigration status. In August of 1949, I received the final papers from the American Consul, and an actual departure date.

DEPARTURE FOR AMERICA

I reported to the port of Bremerhaven for the final processing for immigration to America. There I ran into some friends I had met in other youth camps. Each one of them was excited at the anticipated meeting with their American relatives (sponsors). My excitement was somewhat subdued. I was the only one who did not have relatives in America.

We boarded the U.S. Naval Liberty ship, General Howze, and were assigned to our quarters. I was in the middle bunk of three levels, two decks down from the main deck. The ship was immaculate. We were given clean sheets, an army blanket, and a dining room schedule for three meals a day. The efficient organization and the orderly handling of 1500 people in such a confined area was impressive. The passengers came from many DP camps, of various nationalities, men, women and children of all ages. They were all excited and happy to be on this ship. It was the last leg of a very long journey. It was the culmination of a dream.

The ship's horn sounded; it announced the departure from Bremerhaven. The passengers were gathered on the main deck to witness the historic occasion. It was an exciting and emotional moment. The ship started to move away from the shore, and the entire harbor came into view; then the surrounding area of the city, and finally the adjacent, green countryside could be seen.

Memories from the past flashed in front of me. My mind wandered back to some of the last images of my family.

My father, always concerned about his family, in Wyszkow, running into the building to tell us to get out, when the building was on fire.

My mother, in Pultusk, strong and persistent, running after the German soldier who refused to pay for the apples.

My oldest brother Shalom, the athlete, talking to his team before the start of the soccer game.

My older brother Shymon, independent and confident, in his school uniform in Grodno.

My younger sisters Sima and Lea; I could see them clearly, walking into the dining room holding hands, for the evening meal, the day before I left the orphanage for the summer camp.

Five year-old little sister Rachel, and the baby, three year-old Benjamin, standing there with puzzled looks on their faces when we said good bye, the day we left them at the orphanage in Grodno.

I was leaving Germany, the country whose policy was genocide, and it almost succeeded.

I was leaving the country where I spent over four years waiting for this day.

I was leaving Europe, the continent of my birth, where I spent my childhood years, but hardly experienced my childhood.

I was leaving the continent where my entire family was scattered in unknown graves.

I was leaving the continent where the people thought to be highly civilized had behaved in a most uncivilized way.

I stood on the deck with many others until the only thing in sight was water. Occasionally, another ship would pass . Finally I went down to my deck to familiarize myself with the area which was to be my home for the next thirteen days.

The next morning, after breakfast, the ship's staff asked for volunteers to perform various tasks for the duration of the trip. I volunteered to work in the electrical shop, to fix electric fans. The shop was located in the stern, one deck below the main deck. A few passengers got seasick that first day, but the number quickly increased as the waves got higher the second day. On the third day, the entire main deck was covered with seasick passengers. The motion of the ship where the electrical shop was located, was much more pronounced. Every time I sensed that sick feeling coming, I would run up to the main deck for some fresh air, and stay there until my stomach settled down. After about

one week, the lines in the mess hall grew longer; people were hungry, a sign they felt better. I decided it would be a good time to walk around the main deck to look for familiar faces. Suddenly I saw Nellie Karabinik lying on the deck, and Selig was sitting next to her. Nellie and her husband had welcomed us to their home in Baranovici four years earlier. Nellie was so sick, she kept saying, "I want to die;" and she couldn't eat anything for several days.

I would meet with the Karabiniks on the main deck several times a day. Their destination was Los Angeles, and my destination was Oakland. We were all going to California. Again, it was fate for us to be close to each other and to remain life-long close friends. I was honored to be called her "adopted son."

ARRIVAL IN THE U.S.A.

The passengers were buzzing with excitement the last two days on the ship. We were told the ship would reach port some time in the middle of the night. Everybody was getting ready to leave the ship. When we woke up, the morning of September 5, 1949, the ship was docked in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA. The passengers flocked to the main deck, curious, taking in the sights of the port in front of us. It was the new continent, our new home! There was little activity on shore, and there was no activity on our ship. A few officials, in white shirts and ties, carrying their briefcases, came on board and soon left the ship. It was explained to us that it was Labor Day, an American holiday. Therefore, no one was working, so we would debark the next day.

Representatives from the Jewish community arranged for the Jewish passengers to board buses and took us to the Jewish Community Center. We were greeted by friendly, Yiddish-speaking local residents. In the courtyard was a long row of tables laden with bananas, oranges, grapes, etc. Only two weeks ago in Bremerhaven, a friend had bought one banana and shared it with four other people. For us these were luxury fruits . The reception was warm, sincere and very friendly. Our first venture on American soil left us with a very positive impression. We returned to the ship and got ready for debarkation the next day.

The passengers were organized into various groups, depending on their destinations. The Karabiniks and I were in the same group, and boarded a train for California. On the train, I spent my waking hours looking out the window, absorbing the sights of the vast and mostly empty country. People in the small towns of rural America always waved to our passing train. After dark, the colorful neon signs were fascinating. It looked like the towns were decorated for some festive occasion. Whenever the train stopped, we would get off and try to communicate with the local people. They would always ask us where we were going. When they heard California, they would express envy and tell us what a nice state it is. It was very reassuring to experience the positive reactions from the local people at every stop.

On the third day, the train pulled into Los Angeles, and we all got off. This was the Karabinik's final destination. Their sponsor, Selig's sister, was not there to greet them; that was a great disappointment to Nellie. However, representatives from the Jewish community were there to welcome every newcomer.

I transferred to another train and continued my trip, overnight, to Oakland. The next morning, a small group of us arrived in Oakland and were greeted by representatives of the Oakland Jewish community. Sam Panicz was there to greet me and take me home. Sam lived with his sister, Luba, and her family. Sam and I shared a room. I was treated like a member of the family. About three weeks after my arrival, The Jewish Community Center found a room for me. I moved out of the Shuman's home and started a life of my own.

It was a time of uncertainty, a time of major adjustment, and a time of great hope.

I thought, if only my family could have been here with me to enjoy the promise of this new home.

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

Several rivers cut across the town of Pultusk, tributories to the major river Narew which winds through the town like a snake. The river was supposed to be the natural border between the two occupying powers which divided Poland in 1939. Therefore, the Nazis decided to assemble the town's Jewish residents and drive them across the Narew bridge leading to Wyszkow so that the town, without the Jews, would be annexed to East-Prussia. However, the situation changed overnight; the border was moved east to the river Bug to please Germany. The Nazis did not cancel their plan for the Jewish population. They went ahead and drove out every Jew, barefoot and naked, like dogs.

It was Sukkot eve (Jewish harvest festival). I happen to have returned from my first trip with my horse-and-wagon from the town of Wolomin and I got stuck at the "Pig Market". I didn't even have time to shave, when I heard German orders: "Jew raus! Raus! Raus!"

We all ran to the attic to hide. Through the cracks in the roof, we could see groups of people in the middle of the street, some with children in their arms and others with bundles over their shoulders. We heard German voices get closer and closer to us. I instinctively hid behind the chimney, which stood like a brick tombstone. I sat down with my back leaning against the chimney and fell asleep. From the rooms below, the loud screams of "Jude raus! Jude raus!" reached me in my dream. The screams from below: "If I find another Jew here, I will kill him! Down Jew!" woke me. I looked around the attic and realized that I was all alone. The others left without noticing me. I left the attic and went downstairs.

A German hit me across the shoulders with a plank and pushed me towards a group of assembled Jews. They drove us on the Warsaw Road in the direction of the market square. From the streets and alleys, men, women and children streamed with their suitcases and bundles, with tears running down their cheeks. We walked, rifles pointed at us, humiliated, with bowed heads

like at a family funeral. We were embarassed to look into the eyes of the cheerful-looking Polish faces. They displayed delight and hurled insults and curses at us. The gentile population rejoiced at our tragedy. Now they had the opportunity to go and rob the Jewish homes, pillage the belongings acquired by hard work, with sweat, blood and tears, over hundreds of years.

At the castle, we were forced through a narrow door into the large park. Almost every other person was hit with a rifle butt or kicked by a boot. By the time one recovered from the blows, he found himself separated from his loved ones, all alone. We were crowded against the hill with its county building at the top and the German flag with the swastika flying from the roof. Along the white wall, menacing machine gunners were pointing their weapons at us.

We were convinced we would be shot and buried in a mass grave without leaving a trace of us. Husbands were saying goodby to their wives and mothers were kissing their children farewell. The park was filled with sobbing and lament. Children's screams "Mommy!" and "Daddy!" filled the air. Many people were petrified with fear, apathy was in their glazed eyes.

After several hours of mortal fear, we were taken to a little house in the park. The rooms were lined with barrels, buckets and boxes filled with valuables. Each person was searched. They confiscated gold, money and any other valuables people managed to take from their homes. After the search, people were driven out through a gate in the fence near the wooden bridge. It was impossible for anybody to escape. We were funneled through a path lined by Germans. They delivered blows with billy-clubs and rifle-butts, driving us in the direction of the river Narew and to the road to Wyszkow. The bridge and the road on the other side were full of people whose fate was now in the hands of God. The Germans amused themselves by firing their rifles after the traumatized Jews; the bullets whizzed past our ears.

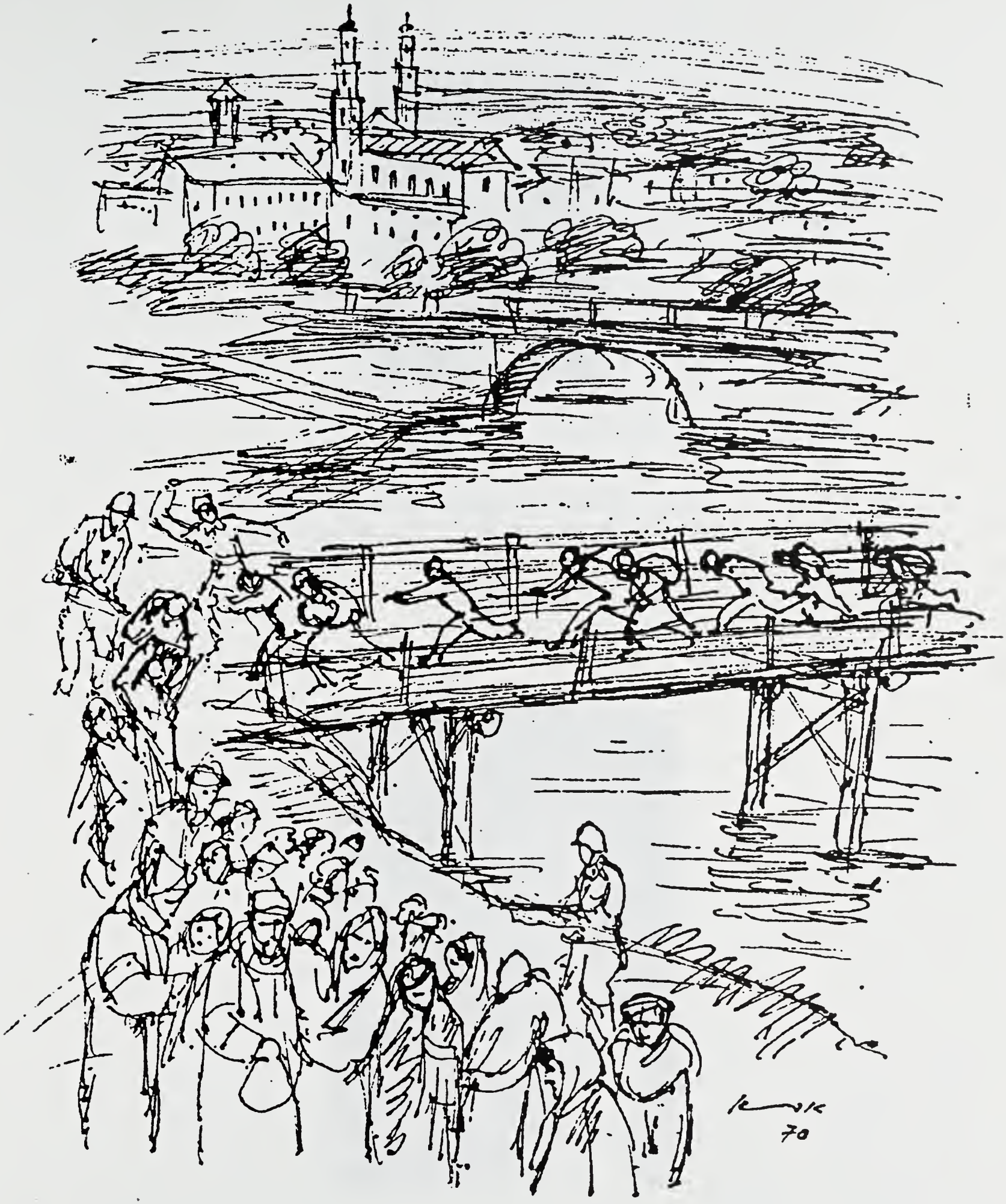
The bridge was practically empty when our turn came to

cross it. My brother-in-law and I clung to each other; we got separated from our families. We tried to avoid a beating when crossing the bridge. A German with a rubber club or a stick stood on the bridge every 10 meters. We both pretended that we were cripples and breathing hard, we ran across the bridge. Luckily we managed to reach the other side without getting a beating.

Like homeless dogs, we wandered on roads through hostile Polish villages and through pillaged Jewish communities until we reached the Soviet-German border.

Account by Moshe Srebra
From Pultusk Memorial Book

(Translated from Yiddish)



Expulsion of the Jews, Pultusk, September 26, 1939
(Reproduced from the Pultusk Memorial Book)

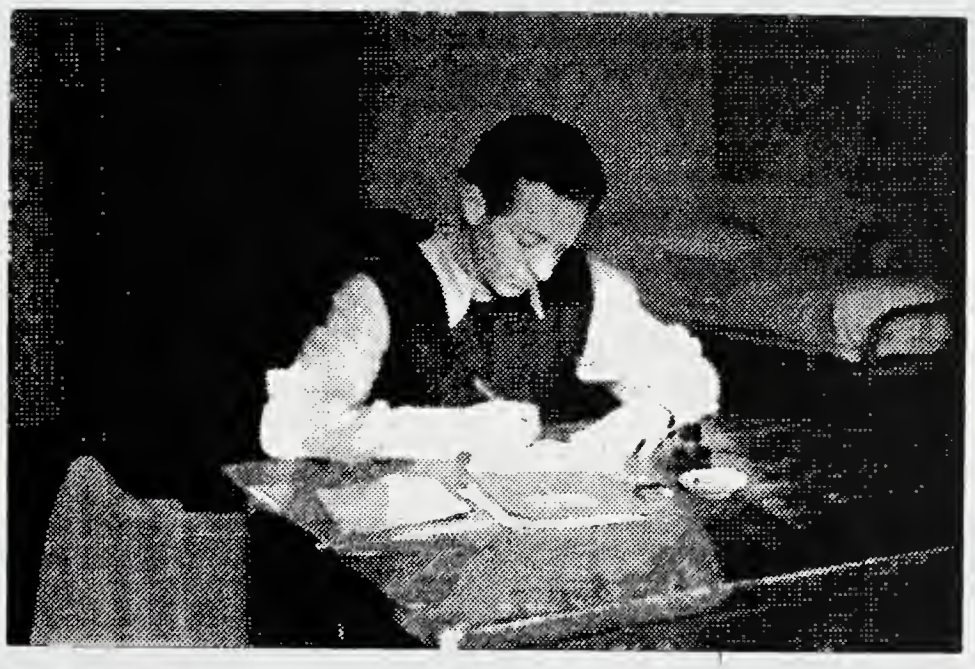
My father, Pesach Katz, 1939
(Enlargement from a group picture)

Picture of me in Achtyrka, 1945

Anna, in Sumy, Ukraine, 1945

Standing left to right: Charles Shuman, Sam Panich, and I.
Sitting left to right: Luba Shuman with baby, Fruma Rabinowitz
with baby and Salomon Rabinowitz
DP camp Bad Reichenhall, 1947

Kibbutz sign on the roof of the building, Bad Reichenhall, 1947
(I am on the right)



Refugee youth camp, Bad Aibling, 1949

Refugee youth camp, Wartenberg, 1949
(I am in the middle)

VOLUNTEER WORKERS OF THE FEDERATION GREET MEMBERS OF SEVEN D.P. FAMILIES recently arrived at the 16th Street Depot—the largest number ever to come to Oakland at one time. The Volunteers of the Social Service Board and Oakland Section of the Council of Jewish Women took the new immigrants out to breakfast, then drove them to their new homes.

Arrival to Oakland, September 1949
(I am in the back row, next to the two men with hats.
Sam Panicz is on the right, with the white hat).

These men who are now working in Plant Two are natives of countries such as Poland, Russia, Germany and Hungary. Left to right: Back row, Max Issak, Feodor Beck, Victor Shikaloff, Henry Scharf, Arkadi Worobiew, Tevel Shindell, and Morris Weinberg. Front row, Elevferiy Baksheeff, Maurice Taub, Wilfred Kay, Illes Jaeger and Abram Lubliner. Their ages range from nineteen to fifty-five years.

Marchant Calculating Machines Company, Oakland, 1951

A NEW LIFE

A few days after I arrived in Oakland, a social worker from the Jewish Federation interviewed each newcomer to evaluate our skills for employment. The economy was in a serious recession in 1949. With a severe language problem and without a skill, finding a job was very difficult.

Each one of us who wanted to find employment immediately enrolled in an English class for foreign born. My first job was in a gas station. I painted recapped tires with a black paint to make them look like new. Three days later, after all the tires had been painted, I was told to help service the cars as they pulled in for gas. A customer pointed to his car and said something to me. I didn't understand a word he said. The puzzled man lifted the hood of his car and added water in the radiator. Communication was not the only problem; I knew nothing about cars. At the end of the day the owner told me not to come to work the next day.

The second job was with a liquidator who bought merchandise of bankrupt companies. I helped load and unload the truck. The work was sporadic; I was called whenever they needed my help. The next temporary job was in the stock room with the Jewish Community thrift shop at the minimum wage of 75¢ an hour.

Every job taught me something new. I was hired to help with the remodeling of a large appartment house. The work involved steaming off wall paper, preparing the walls for painting, removing the debris etc. It was the first full time job. The work was interesting and the pay was good. It was nice to watch the transformation of a run-down building into nice, clean appartments. The job lasted only several months.

When I heard work might be available in Petaluma, I moved there. Sam Shainski, the owner of Petaluma Poultry Wholesalers

Company, gave me a job in the chicken killing room. I was later assigned to the only night job in the plant. The entire plant had to be cleaned from accumulated blood and feathers. The machinery had to be cleaned and lubricated and the chickens had to be fed. The plant had to be ready for the next day's operation. It was an effort to accomplish all the tasks in eight hours. Night work deprived me of any social life and I could not continue with my night school. After about one year in Petaluma, I moved back to Oakland. The newcomers in Petaluma were a friendly and close community. I especially became close with the Stachels, who became like family to me. It developed into a close and lasting friendship.

In Oakland, I went to work for Marchant Calculating Machines company, where my good friend Henry Sharp worked.

After only a few months in the country, the Selective Service called me for the military draft. I did not know enough English to fill out the required forms, so they gave me a six months deferment. I was called again in the fall of 1951. I passed the medical examination and rported to Fort Ord, for basic training November 28, 1951.

After eight weeks of basic training, recruits were tested for special skills for possible special training. I passed the language tests in German, Russian and Polish. I was disappointed when my request for special training in the Monterey language school was turned down. They felt that my knowledge of the languages was good enough for the military. Therefore, I continued with the full sixteen weeks of basic training.

After basic training, all except three recruits from our company were sent to the Korean War in the Far East. I was one of the three who reported to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, in April 1952, for assignment to Europe. Two and one half years after arrival in the U.S., I found myself again on a military ship,

crossing the Atlantic Ocean, on the way back to Germany.

I reported to the 28th Infantry Division in Goeppingen, West Germany. My permanent assignment was with the Military Government ✓ Section at Division Headquarters. The Section consisted of: the Chief, a colonel; Assistant Chief, a leftenant or captain; and four enlisted men. Three of the enlisted men spoke German and one or more other languages. The primary function of the MG Section was to serve as liason between the local German government and the American occupation forces. I applied my self-taught, limited German on many assignments. I used Russian and Polish only on a few occasions. English was my weakest language at that time. It was an interesting and challenging assignment.

After 18 months in Germany as a member of the American Occupation Forces, I returned to the United States. I was discharged from the Army at Camp Stoneman, California, November 1953, a short bus ride from what I considered home, Oakland. I immediately returned to my old job on the assembly line at Marchant Calculating Machines Company.

It was always my dream to acquire a skill which would lead to challenging and rewarding work. As a veteran who served during the Korean war, I was eligible for educational assistance of $110 per month for a period of about three school years.

I enrolled at City College of San Francisco as a full time student in September 1954. My Cal Vet educational allowance was supplemented by working as an electrician in the shipyards during the summer vacations and by sorting mail in the Post Office during the Christmas vacations. The 60-70 hour weeks, in both jobs, provided me with enough income for the three years as a student.

During the first year, I received my high school diploma

and fulfilled other prerequisites required by the school. Two years later, I graduated with an AA degree and a Certificate of Completion in Electrical Technology. Rachel, my future wife, and Mr. and Mrs. Shainski, my former employer from Petaluma, attended my graduation ceremonies. The presence of the Shainskis had special significance; they represented my dead parents.

Three years of hard work, learning a skill and overcoming language problems at the same time, paid off. One week after graduation, June 17, 1957, I started to work as an Engineering Draftsman for P.G.& E. Company. it was the type of job I was hoping for.

After a four year courtship, January 30, 1958, Rachel and I got married. I was elated when on May 10th, 1959, on Mother's Day, our daughter Rena was born. We were now a complete family.

The work at P.G.& E. was interesting and challenging. I continued my education by taking various courses in the evening. I got a promotion about every two years. Twelve years after joining the company, I became supervisor of our unit. Two years later I was promoted to Electrical Design Section Supervisor. The section was made up of approximately eighty Engineering Designers and Draftsmen. I remained in the position until my retirement in April 1987. It was a challenging and very rewarding thirty years with the company.

To my great surprise, during the height of the cold war, in 1960, an intelligence organization asked me to join a special program where my military experience and my language skills were needed. After receiving a leave of absence from P.G.& E. and assurance that my job would be there when I returned, I agreed to join the program.

After four months of intensive training in the Washington, D.C. area, I returned to my family and resumed my career with

P.G.& E. However, the program required that I keep in contact with the organization in Washington and participate in exercises, in various parts of the country, during the summer.

They asked me a hypothetical question. If offered a job in intelligence work, what country would I prefer? Obviously, it was leading to greater involvement. I declined to participate in a summer exercise and gradually terminated my involvement with the organization.

Years later, in 1973, the CIA asked me to participate in special projects on a part-time basis. The work sounded very interesting and tempting. But, after serious consideration, I declined to get involved.

My family, permanent roots, and my career with P.G.& E. were much more important.

EPILOG (Added in 2001)

More than 50 years of silence, and the concern of fading memories, finally impelled me to make a record of the Holocaust Period. The primary purpose of my memoir is to tell the story of the fate of my young parents and their children – my six siblings.

In a writing class, I was expected to share my story with the rest of the class, but I declined to do so. One of the students asked why Holocaust survivors don't like to talk about their experiences. I asked myself the same question. Perhaps because The Holocaust is a sacred subject, and should be treated with reverence, to be discussed only in appropriate situations; or perhaps because people who did not experience the Holocaust cannot possibly understand it. The reasons vary, but some reasons are common to most survivors.

After the war, when survivors met, the obvious questions were: Where were you during the war? , and; Did any other family members surrive? Even when close friendships developed, details of the war experiences were seldom discussed. I still don't know much about my best friend's Holocaust details. He doesn't feel comfortable talking about the time he spent in the concentration camps.

Individual experiences usually had the same tragic results; every survivor lost all family members, with only few exceptions. Silence is probably a subconscious, defensive mechanism to block out the painful experiences of the past. The tragedy played out for *six years*, and there was no desire to relive it. Silence was needed in order to cope, and to focus on the future.

The wartime experience was *always* on my mind, right below the surface. Father was shot when he was only 39 years old, in the prime of his life. His most important concern was always his family. His silence , during our forced march from Wyszkow during the first week of WWII, spoke volumes, even to me, an eleven-year old son. It was painful for him to be completely helpless; not to be able to protect his family. He was a crushed man when the Germans separated him from the family, and took him away, never to be seen again.

During the summer of 1942, the German killing machine was very active in Belarus, where Mother and all my siblings lived. The Jewish population in Lachovici was rounded up, driven out of town, shot and buried in a mass grave.

Mother, at the age of 39, oldest brother Sholom, at age 17, second brother Shymon, at age 15, Sister Sima, at age 12, and Sister Lea, age 10 were among those murdered in Lachovici. Mother probably huddled her children and recited a prayer, as we did in Wyszkow three years earlier, when we expected to die there. Their mass grave on the outskirts of Lachovici is not even marked; it is an indistinguishable field.

Seven-year old sister Rachel, in an orphanage in Bialystok, and six-year old baby brother Benjamin in an orphanage in Grodno were probably picked up by the Germans during the massive roundup during the Summer of 1942..

Exactly how they died and the location of their graves is unknown. They were not even old enough to know what was going on.

A friend told me how he helped liberate Dachau, a concentration camp outside Munich. He went on to say that "history is full of the stories of holocausts". But no other holocaust compares with that of World War II. During the Spanish inquisittion, the Jews had a choice of converting to Christianity or leave the country. During other persecution events, the persecuted had a choice; in exchange for their lives, they could change their religion, their political views, or they could leave the country.

The Germans did not give the defenseless Jews any choice. Men, women, children, babies, people of partial Jewish heritage, without exception, were marked for extinction. The Germans methodically hunted for every Jew. Those lucky enough to survive, did so because they could not be found by the Germans. Some concentration camp inmates survived only because The Allied Military Forces liberated them before the Germans managed to kill them. The Germans pursued their policy of the "Final Solution" to the very end of the war. Survival for the Jews was a matter of sheer chance.

After the war, the German population claimed they did not know about the massive killing of Jews. The hatred of Jews was public policy. Every one of their Jewish neighbors disappeared from the cities and towns throughout Germany. Thousands of Germans were members of the killing machine. Many more thousands from the German military forces assisted in the roundups, persecutions and murder of the Jews. These many thousands of participants and accessories to the crimes surely corresponded with their

families and friends in Germany. They travelled to their homes during the war, and hundreds of thousands returned to their homes after the war ended. Didn't they communicate with their families and friends?. They obviously knew about the policy and the activities to exterminate Jews throughout German-occupied Europe.

The Jewish Ghettos were small islands surrounded by a sea of hostile population. Some locals helped round up Jews, or betrayed those in hiding , motivated by hatred or for some reward. Most of the population stood by indifferently, as the few who tried to help hide Jews did so at the risk of their lives. Jews never had a chance to resist. They had no place to run, and they had no one to help them.

After the war, survivors feverishly looked for other family survivors. Everybody was hoping for a miracle.

My search and hope for a miracle continues to this day. After arriving in the US, I wrote to the places in Belarus where family members lived before the war, seeking information about their fate. There was no response.

I wrote again after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The usual response was "The records were destroyed in the war". To my great surprise and delight, my home town, Pultusk, located the birth certificates for all my brothers and sisters including mine. With the passage of time, the memory of the Holocaust victims will grow dimmer. The existence of the birth certificates of my siblings, in some way , will help preserve their memory.

Agencies with archives of missing persons in Europe, Israel and the US, found no information about any of my family members. A new source of wartime documents became available from the former Soviet Union, but the search is slow and tedious. Periodically, the Red Cross informs me that they do not have any information about my family, but the search continues.

The Bialystoker Memorial Book describes the destruction of the Jewish Community in their city. The account relating to the fate of the children was of special interest to me.

The last 1200 young children, accompanied by a few adult volunteers were sent to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in August, 1943. Three months later, the children and the adults

supervising them had been sent to Auschwitz, *the killing factory*. They all perished in the gas chambers. My sister, Rachel was in an orphanage in Bialystok when the war started. She may have been among the 1200 children who died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

I sometimes fantasize and wonder how life would have evolved for our family if the Holocaust had never happened. Father, with great enthusiasm, worked on the opening of the ORT school in 1938. He was looking forward to expanding the school, so as to accommodate other children who wanted to learn a trade. He was enthusiastic and excited about the future.

Mother worked tirelessly at raising her children, and managing the household. In the evening, after the younger children were put to bed, she would sit at the table with a glass of tea, weary, but with a contented look on her face.

In the not-too-distant future, the parents would have watched their children, with great pride and joy, graduating from school. Soon they would have experienced parental delight and concern watching their children leave the nest, etc., etc.

Oldest Brother Sholom, the serious student, athletic, and popular with neighborhood kids, an obvious leader with the potential of becoming the pride of the family.

Second Brother Shymon, very independent. Mother trusted his good judgment and maturity, and allowed him to leave the family to join a technical school in another town at the tender age of 13. He would have been successful at anything he decided to do.

I can't even speculate or fantasize about my younger four siblings. Their personality traits had not yet become obvious to me. How interesting it would have been to observe how they grew and matured.

I fantasize about a family reunion with my siblings and their families, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces, etc. My daughter, Rena, did not experience the love and joy of grandparents. The void of normal life structure will be felt by other generations.

The Holocaust touched the Jewish communities throughout the World. The number of survivors is fast declining. In another decade, there will not be any living witnesses to the horrendous evil perpetrated by a "civilized and cultured society".

The Holocaust cannot be forgotten. Future generations will find that their roots have been ripped out during the Holocaust. Future generations will discover that Europe, especially Poland is the graveyard of their ancestors.

With mixed emotions, I had decided to visit Pultusk, the place where I spent the first eleven years of my life. In 1995, my wife, Rachel, and I left for Poland. In Warsaw, we rented a taxi for the day; and in less than two hours, we stood in the large cobble-stoned town square. The old brick clock tower at one end of the square looked the same, but without the clock. At the other end of the square, the white , spotless Catholic church now looked old and in need of work. Gone were the the nice two-story buildings on the sides of the square. The Jewish owners lived upstairs, over their shops. The square was the center of commerce, and the site of various municipal activities. The central part of town was totally destroyed during the last year of the war, and rebuilt with simple functional buildings. The new buildings completely changed the character of the town.

My memory of the vibrant town, full of lively children playing in the street now looked drab and lifeless. All traces of a Jewish community have disappeared, including the cemetery.

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